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DORCAS.

VOL. II



# DORCAS

BY

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&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## PART II.

THE NEW LIFE IN THE HOUSE.



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## D O R C A S.

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### CHAPTER I.

**A**N open window, with the May breezes coming softly through it—a library, silent except for the occasional scratch of a busy pen, and on the broad, old-fashioned window-seat a small figure, curled up, quiet as a mouse, with a bit of something it called needlework in its tiny hands—some garment, or fancied garment, for a doll, that it was fashioning clumsily, with feeble, patient fingers. The little brow was puckered as it stooped over its work ; the small mouth was set with the intentness of its endeavour ; unconscious of discomfort from the full sun-

shine in its eyes, minute after minute the small creature went on with its work, persevering, steady, silent.

Sometimes from his table where he sat at work Mr. Trelawney glanced at the brown bent head, but the glance was rarely more than a placid, momentary, passing look ; the busy man had grown accustomed to have this small, staid figure in his sight ; its presence brought no sense of disturbance to him, but only instead of that a happy sense of peace and of possession—a feeling that within the four walls of this quiet room of his he held all that was dearest to him in the world—his books, the friends of all his life, and this *new* friend,—his child.

His life had altered a good deal since that day when little Dorcas, lying in her nurse's arms, had been presented to him for his first unwilling kiss,—a small, pink, shrivelled creature, so unpleasant to his

sight and to his touch that for weeks after she had come into the world he had scarcely been able to subdue an involuntary feeling of repulsion when he was forced, by the stress of Letty's beseeching eyes, to put his lips upon her. Her helplessness had touched him with a certain kindly pity, but her wrinkled softness almost made him shudder as with a sense of nearness to something unwholesome and unfledged.

"She grows so pretty—doesn't she, dear?" Letty would say to him constantly, in her innocent joy and pride. "Some babies are quite ugly little things when they are born first; but look at *her*! Look at her dear little mouth, and her lovely eyes. Did you ever see such a mouth? Isn't it like a rose-bud?"

And to such speeches as these he used to find it hard to make reply.

"I suppose she is a very nice baby. I

have no doubt she is, Letty," he would answer, kindly ; and two or three times a day he would pat the little cheeks, and let the tiny hand close round his finger, and morning and evening would compel himself to kiss some part of the infant's face, feeling always instinctively that Letty's hungry heart watched for these embraces, and would have mourned and fretted if they had not been given.

" For you *do* like her, dear—don't you?" she would say to him with yearning wistfulness sometimes. " You like to kiss her, and to feel that she's your very own? Oh ! of course I know she can't be the same to you yet that she is to me ; but you do think that you'll grow fond of her soon? You can understand now how people love babies so very, *very* much?" she would say, in her weakness (for this was before her recovery

was complete), pressing her questions on him with innocent, unconscious persistence.

During these first weeks, indeed, I am afraid that Letty's baby-worship tried him more than she ever dreamed. He would come and sit beside her, prepared to converse about ordinary things, and she would talk of nothing but the child, discoursing about it with a delight and an eloquence that knew neither weariness nor exhaustion. He would attempt in vain to change the subject. He would tell her about some other matter, and she would listen indeed with gentle patience ; she would try, perhaps, for five minutes, to give her mind to this different thing ; but at the five minutes' end the happy yearning lips would break into a soft smile again, and once more, for the hundredth time, some recollection, some

thought, some hope or wish connected with the child would form itself into tender longing words, as if there were only one groove now in which her mind could move, and have its life and being.

“Oh! she will be everything to me—she will make up for everything!” she used joyfully, in these first days, to think to herself; and yet strangely, in spite of this beginning, as time went on the change that Dorcas’s coming made in the lives of those to whom she belonged was felt almost more by Mr. Trelawney than by Letty.

He had seen no beauty in the tiny face when it was shown to him first, but after a few weeks had passed he began sometimes to come by himself—not even with Letty—into the nursery, where the child lay asleep, and sit down by its cot, and silently look at it. The innocence and repose of the baby face touched him at these

times, and moved him to a deeper and sweeter feeling than any he ever experienced when the child was awake, and open-eyed, and subject to those unreasonable and intolerable attacks of screaming which—to Mr. Trelawney's thinking—so entirely destroyed the angelic element in it. From these fits of imbecile fury he would fly with horror, taking refuge within his study from the sounds, which, however, even those sacred walls would sometimes scarcely shut out. Often at such moments he would go near to forming an unfatherly wish that a child had never been born to him—a wish, indeed, repented of quickly, as of a sin against God and Letty, yet coming often for a few hasty seconds, quite involuntarily, during those first months of his parenthood—till insensibly that early time merged into a later one, and he woke one day to find suddenly that Dorcas's baby arms had closed

fast about his neck, and her baby fingers set a grip upon his heart too close for him to loosen any more.

He made this discovery when the child was a year old—unexpectedly, as discoveries are often made—and to his great amazement.

“I don’t think baby is well,” Letty had been saying anxiously to him one day. “Her little hands are so hot, and she keeps crying so.”

But he had only laughed at her.

“I think she gets into a habit of crying for nothing,” he said. “No doubt many children do. You had better put her to bed, and, if you can, give her something to make her sleep.” And he shut himself into his study, tired of the wailing sound that would not cease.

But Letty sat up that night with the child, and in the middle of the night she came to

her husband's side, and woke him with a scared face.

"Oh, Gilbert, she is so ill! I want you to come and look at her. Come fast—come fast!" she cried; and when he hurried to the nursery he saw a sight that drove the blood to his heart with terror, for the child was in convulsions.

He threw on his clothes, and rushed out of the house to fetch Dr. Gibson. "What shall we do if she dies? Good God, what shall we do?" he was crying to himself, unconscious almost that he was doing it, as he ran breathless along the road.

"Our little girl is ill. Can you come at once?" he exclaimed to the doctor, when he had rung him up. "I don't know what it is. It looks to me as if she had been poisoned," he cried, with his voice breaking.

"I'll come with you in three minutes," the doctor answered, from his window; and

in almost less than the promised time the two men were hastening back to the house.

They found little Dorcas better for the moment. Poor Letty in her ignorance would have been utterly helpless and unconscious what to do, but one of her servants (she had never had any regular nurse, fearing to have any, lest the charge of the child should be taken out of her hands, but this woman had had some experience of children) knew what was the matter, and between them they had got a hot bath, and put the little one into it.

“Why did you not send for me sooner? Didn’t you see that she was not well?” Dr. Gibson asked, when he had looked for a few moments at her.

“I knew she wasn’t *quite* well, but I thought it was only her teeth,” poor Letty answered, humbly.

“*Only* her teeth ! And are her teeth not enough ?” muttered the doctor, half angrily.

The child had fallen into an uneasy sleep, and he sat down by the little crib, and said presently that he would stay for the rest of the night and watch her. His experienced eye probably told him that the danger was only as yet partially escaped—and he was right, for before the night had ended a second and a more severe convulsion came, in which the thread of the little life was almost broken.

For two days after this—two days of silent and terrible suspense—they did not know if the child would have strength to rally. During these days poor Letty never left her ; often, too, for hours her father sat by her side, gazing helplessly, with a sense of strange indescribable misery, at the little white shrunken face. If it were to pass out of his sight—if the child were to die—how

were they to go on living? he sometimes passionately thought.

But Dorcas did not die. They watched beside her for those two days; and then the pallid cheeks began to recover their tone, and the blue eyes to open again on the world that they had almost left; and as the life came back into the little veins a feeling of hitherto unknown joy awoke in Mr. Trelawney's heart, such as almost overwhelmed him—a feeling the like of which he never had experienced before through all the quiet years that he had lived.

From this time forward he loved the child with a love that was almost as entire, and that by degrees became almost even more passionate than Letty's. It is true that he still for a while would wince occasionally when piercing cries of distress, that seemed to have no adequate cause, penetrated

through his study walls, or, still worse, broke (as they would sometimes do) from the little lady's lips without the slightest apparent shadow of reason, even when he was tenderly gazing at her, or holding her in his arms; but these momentary disturbances came gradually to be regarded by him only as the unaccountable whims of childhood, if possible to be fled from, but, even if to fly from them should prove impracticable, not to be remembered after they were past.

“I suppose they *must* do these things; I suppose it is the sign of the old Adam in them,” he came to think; “we are all stamped with his seal abundantly, and this is no doubt the way in which it shows itself first.”

So, accounting for his daughter's capricious ebullitions of temper in this manner,

and looking on them as inevitable but temporary evils, he gradually resigned himself to them with a satisfied philosophy.

When Dorcas first began to talk, her stammering utterances made a curious and sweet music in her father's ear; when her unsteady little feet began to toddle up and down the floors, he took to following those most uncertain steps with an anxious eagerness that must seriously have disturbed his peace. Strangely enough, from quite early days—as soon as she could walk and talk at all—he used to like to carry her into his study, and shut himself up with her there; and she too rapidly developed a taste for being so shut up, and would cry to be taken to papa, and struggle to escape from Letty's arms, till sometimes Letty's heart would ache a little sadly.

“She cares for you so much more than

for me ; she doesn't care to be with me a bit," she would often say, trying to laugh, but yet not laughing quite.

For indeed it was true, and Letty, with all her love, never won her little daughter's fastidious heart as Mr. Trelawney did. It was in his arms that the little maiden, almost from the first, loved best to rest ; he was the playfellow whose power of playing pleased her most ; to him, as she grew older, she always cared, far more than to her mother, to carry her little joys and sorrows, and his reproof, when she was naughty, was the only one of which she stood in dread.

Poor Letty loved her blindly and passionately, but Dorcas, I am sorry to say, on her side, did not love her mother very much. With a curious instinct, she seemed, from a wonderfully early age, to be conscious of her mother's weakness of character, and,

however tenderly she might treat her, to mingle her tenderness with a certain tone of condescension which Letty, in her unconquerable humility, meekly submitted to, and, though it pained her often, hardly ever resented, or regarded it as anything more than she deserved.

“For she’s so clever, you see,” she would say sometimes to Mrs. Markham; “she’s like her father, bless her! And like takes to like, you know. It’s not to be looked for that she’d think much of me.” And she would stoop and press her lips with a half sad kiss upon her little daughter’s cheek, and smooth her hair from her brow, and then the next moment would listen with a sigh to the little fingers tapping at the study door; for the child would stay with her mother while she held her at her side, but as soon as she was released the toddling steps went always in one direction, and

Letty would hear the impatient demand of "Oppen, oppen!" that never was made at the door of any room in which *she* sat.

"She'd leave me for her father any day. I suppose I might go away, and they'd neither of them ever miss me, or ever care," she said sadly, and almost bitterly, once or twice.

Yet, though she spoke sadly, Letty's life was fuller and happier now, and Letty herself, perhaps, was stronger to bear some troubles than she had been before her child was born. To most people, as time goes on, the back gets fitted to the burden that it has to bear, and the sharp sorrow of to-day becomes only to-morrow's subdued pain. Letty had had her short time of rapture, and her bitter awakening from it; and now—the world was coming by degrees to put on something of its every-day garb again, and she had her fits of sadness still, and her

passionate longings, and sometimes even her passionate despairs ; but in spite of longings her house had to be ordered (as she best could order it), and her little girl had to be nursed and clothed, and sometimes, fortunately, the common cares of her daily life made her half forget her disappointed hopes, and the simple joys of which she had her share came to her in at least partial stead of those other joys of which, in her girlhood, she had so vainly dreamed.

“I never ought to have married him,” she still said to herself in many sorrowful hours, when the fact of her own separateness from him, and of the loss of position that she had brought upon him, weighed heavily on her ; but she could say it now without the intense remorse and anguish with which the thought had overwhelmed her once. She had married him in her ignorance, not knowing the cost at which he would have to

make her his wife ; not knowing that in any true sense he *could* not marry her, because she could not think his thoughts nor live his life—because he had a past into which she could not enter, and looked to a future in which he made no effort to give *her* a place.

Yet what was done could not be altered now, and, half with sorrow, half with a secret joy, Letty carried this thought with her all through her days. She might have no right to her husband or her child—yet they were hers ; they might love one another more than they loved her,—yet they must let her live with them and serve them. As the years went on, this poor weak mistress of the house had no dignified sense, I fear, of what ought to be her proper place in it, or of what was due to her. She made herself a servant to the others, and they—took her service. Her husband trusted her, and was

kind to her ; her little daughter submitted to her ministrations, and rewarded her for them sometimes with a light caress ; and Letty took her wages—a little sadly sometimes, but without a murmur. Perhaps she still sometimes thought silently of King Cophetua's story, wondering how it had fared with the beggar-maid after she became a queen—weaving another continuation of the tale from that which she had woven once. Had the low-born head ached sometimes with the crown upon it (as *her* head ached)?—did the king's friends sometimes turn their backs upon her? Perhaps she too had a little daughter, and the child knew that her mother had only been a beggar-girl, and so turned away from her, and never loved her, because she was ashamed—as some day the little one would be ashamed of *her*, Letty often thought—with

a pang that, as time went on, was perhaps the hardest pain she had to bear.

She had happily fallen, not long after Dorcas's birth, into a state of comparative peace as far as her household arrangements were concerned, for the troubled condition in which Mrs. Markham found her had given that good woman such concern that she had never rested till she had established a new domestic order of things, and delivered poor Letty from the sufferings and the thralldom of the first year of her marriage. She had found a woman who came in time to be something more to Letty even than a faithful servant—a young widow, who had had a husband and child, and lost them both. She wanted a quiet home, and with Letty she found what she desired, and, before they had lived long under the same roof, the two women drew to one another. The

one was so strong, and kind, and capable ; the other so gentle, and grateful, and helpless. Elizabeth became part cook, part nurse, part anything and everything. Before six months had passed she was Letty's right hand in the house. Stupid Susan worked well under her ; Dorcas at sight of her would crow and show signs of baby approbation. She spared Letty many an anxious thought, and gave her many a peaceful hour.

She had been the wife of a young artisan, and had had a tragic story. She and her husband had been married for three years, and were doing well, when one Christmas-time they resolved to take a holiday, and go and spend a week with her mother, and, as they were on their way, the train in which they were travelling ran into another train, and her husband and child were killed as they sat beside her.

“They sent me on to mother’s afterwards,” she said, telling this tale to Letty before she came to her, with quiet, tearless eyes. “I wasn’t hurt, and there was nothing else to do. They took me to mother’s, and she put me to bed, and I lay there for near two months. I had a fever, and was all wrong in my head; and when I began to get better I prayed to God that the fever would come back again and kill me. Poor mother had a hard time with me then. I was terrible ungrateful to her. I couldn’t think of anything but of my two as was dead; but, thank God, that’s past now. It’s four years ago—just four this last Christmas—and I’ll be thirty next March, and I’m a strong woman again. Only, you see, ma’am, I seem as if I’d done with life in one way, and so I’d like a quiet place where I could hope to settle down, and feel a sort of being at home in. I’m not afraid of

work, nor of turning my hand to anything, and I'd love to have to do with a baby again," she said, and looked with a yearning look at little Dorcas lying in Letty's arms.

So Letty engaged her, and never repented of what she had done. Perhaps no one in the house knew, as years went on, what close friends the two women became. There were special ties of sympathy between them. Elizabeth was one of Letty's own class, and, lifted out of her own class though she was now, Letty's heart involuntarily turned to her, and the simple, untaught, but strong and tender-natured woman understood her and her needs as neither Mr. Trelawney nor Dorcas ever did. It was a friendship of which she hardly dared to tell her husband, but even this want of courage the other seemed to comprehend, and, with a rare magnanimity, never showed familiarity in

her master's presence, or presumed on the position that her mistress let her hold.

Little footsteps pattering up and down the stairs, a little high sweet voice making shrill music everywhere : these were strange sounds to fill Mr. Trelawney's once empty and quiet house. He used himself to think so often as he listened to them, recalling that old life of his, comparing it with this that he was living now. Lover of peace as he had been so long, had anything ever thrilled his heart in all the years he had hitherto lived as the touch of these childish fingers thrilled it now ?

He used to lie down on the sofa in his study, and pretend to be immoveably sound asleep, that they might come and wander over him, stroking his cheek, straying amongst his hair, pulling at his coat to try to rouse him, the little voice, too, calling him all the

time with an imperious—"papa! papa!"—till, after he had lain still for a few minutes, submitting to these sweet entreaties, all in a moment he would stretch out his arms, and snatch the little creature in a rapture to his bosom, and cover the brown head with kisses so passionate that, half in delight, half almost in terror, Dorcas would quiver and scream.

Only when he was alone with the child did he ever betray his love for her in this impetuous way. A shy, undemonstrative man in general, it would not have been in his nature to show it so before any witnesses. In the presence of others—even in Letty's presence—he seemed fond of the child, and was kind to her; but that was all: his warmest caresses, his tenderest nonsense, were all reserved for those hours, which both of them liked so well, when no other creature came between them,—when they were all

the world to each other, with everyone else shut out.

The exclusive devotion that was given to Dorcas at these seasons suited that little damsel admirably; the power of giving it, and of attaching her solely to himself, suited Mr. Trelawney's jealous love. He came very quickly to know that she preferred him to every other creature in the house, and in his secret satisfaction in this knowledge I fear that he a good deal forgot Letty and Letty's claims,—nor did he ever, perhaps, even hereafter, remember those rights of hers much, I think.

To the best of his power, it is true, he did try to use his influence over the child for good. Well as he loved her, his eyes, as time passed on, became quite conscious of certain faults in her, and these faults he *tried*, at least, not to pass over lightly. She was imperious and wilful, for instance, and

he did his utmost to teach her submission and gentleness; she was selfish,—as by nature most creatures are,—and he tried to instil into her the habit of giving up her own desires (I do not say that he succeeded in this effort); she rapidly developed an ardent love for pleasure, and he tried hard to awake in her heart a counterbalancing love for duty. I am afraid that sometimes his teaching fell on vacant ears, and that sometimes, too, perhaps, the strength of original sin in the little maiden filled his heart with a temporary consternation; but on the whole she was as good, perhaps, as most children are,—and, at any rate, he was content with her.

As the days of imperfect speech and toddling infancy passed away, it seemed to him, indeed, as if each hour she grew dearer to him. He was thinking this, perhaps, to-day, as his eyes wandered again and again

from his work to rest tenderly on the little figure sitting with busy fingers in the window-seat. Bending there with absorbed face over her piece of futile sewing, how sweet and quaint a picture she made, he thought. He looked at her, and looked—a hundred times. How earnest, patient, persevering she was! Possessing such qualities, what would she not be capable of becoming presently? Surely he should be able to make a student of her—to teach her his own love of books—to make her, perhaps, a fellow-worker with himself? Already the little lips could read easy words,—English words in plenty, and Greeks words even (at least, one or two. He had taught her these secretly, for his own special delight). She had had books for playthings from her earliest years. He had taught her to build houses with them,—to make pyramids of them,—to search their pages for pictures,—

to take them in her arms and kiss them when they fell. "Poor book!—mustn't hurt a poor book, because books feel *very* much," she would murmur to herself; and she would sit on the ground with some big volume that had suffered injury on her knee, stroking and caressing it as if it had been a sentient creature like herself, while her father smiled and watched her—half credulous that this early childish love foreshadowed a genuine love in coming years—half ashamed of and amazed at his own credulity.

She had been sitting sewing for an hour this morning, and for a whole hour her lips had never opened. Mr. Trelawney rose from his chair at last and came and put his hand on the brown head.

"Dorty is very busy to-day?" he said.

"Yes—I'm making a frock," answered Dorty, solemnly. "Because Dolly hasn't a single clean one to put on."

“Poor Dolly ! That is a bad business,” he replied.

“Dolly dirties her frocks so dreadfully fast,”—and Dorcas gave a sigh. “She’s *such* a naughty girl !”

“I would put her in the corner then, if I were you. Perhaps, if you did, it would make her better,” he said.

“*That* wouldn’t make her any better,” she retorted, with scorn.

“I don’t know. When I was a dolly I think I used to be put into the corner.”

“You never were a dolly ! you couldn’t have been !”

“How do you know what I couldn’t have been ?”

And then Dorcas looked up, momentarily posed.

“Well, I don’t *think* you ever were one,” she said, after a second or two of cautious silence.

“Ah—that is another matter. That is saying quite a different thing. *I* don’t think *you* were ever a pussy cat, with a long tail, but yet you *might* have been, you know.”

“And caught mice? and run up trees? and jumped over walls? and said ‘Mew! Mew!’” cried Dorcas, with a little ringing laugh. “Oh, I wish I *could* be a little dear white pussy cat—just for a tiny bit.”

“And then you would come here, and curl yourself up on the window seat, and I would stroke you, and think to myself—‘Why, pussy sits here just as Dorthy used to do.’”

“And I’d laugh and never say a word.”

“No—you wouldn’t be *able* to say anything, you know. You would just open your eyes, and begin to purr,—and presently, perhaps you would hear a little ‘scratch—scratch,’ behind the bookcase, and you would prick up your ears, and in another

instant you would be on your legs, and away you would go over the tops of the books, and there would be a little scuffling there in the corner—and then you would come back with a tiny——”

“Oh, no!” cried Dorthy, quivering and piteous.

“Yes, if you were a pussy cat you would have to do it, you know. You would come back with a poor, tiny, frightened mouse in your mouth.”

“Then I’d just bring it out here, and come and show it to you, and after that I’d drop it down, and say—‘Mousie, run away home.’”

“Not you. You would want to eat it. You would have had no breakfast, and would be far too hungry to let it go.”

“But I couldn’t eat a poor raw mousie. I shouldn’t like to be a pussy cat if I had to cat mousies. I’d far rather be a little girl

than have to do that. Would you like me to be a pussy cat *very* much?"

"Well, not particularly, Dorty. I like you well enough, you see, as you are."

"Do you like little girls, on the whole, better than pussies?"

"H'm—I am not so sure of that. I am rather afraid I like some pussies a good deal better than some little girls."

"Oh!" And Dorcas looked solemnly meditative for some moments.

"I don't think *I* do," she said, gravely, after that pause. "I like little girls very much,—and little boys too."

"I don't think you know many little girls and boys, Dorty," he said, quickly. (In his jealous love he almost winced at her expressing affection for any creature but himself.)

"No, but I'd like to. I'd like some little boys and girls to play with."

“Should you? Do you think they would play with you better than I do?”

“Oh no,”—carelessly. And then a little pause. “But it would be different.”

“Yes, it would be different, no doubt!—and—you are like the rest of your sex, Dorthy, and love new things,” he added, with a touch of bitterness, speaking less to the child than to himself.

“If I had little boy brothers and little girl sisters we could play such a lot of games,” said Dorcas, after a thoughtful silence. “I think it would be so nice.”

“And then Dorcas would go away, and never come in here any more—and poor papa would be left all alone,” he said.

“Oh no! I’d come here just the same as ever.”

“And bring all the boy brothers and the girl sisters with you, you mean? But that wouldn’t suit me at all.”

“Wouldn’t you like to see them?”

“Not I!”

“Not if they were all your *own* little boys and girls?”

“If they were my own little boys and girls, shall I tell you what I would do with them? I would make them up into a big brown paper parcel, and post them.”

“Oh!”

“Get them clean out of the house, Dorthy. Send them to America, so that we should never set eyes on them again.”

“But you couldn’t,—could you?”—with very grave and rather rebuking eyes.

“I think I would try hard. What should I want with any little girls,—except Dorthy?”

“But if you didn’t like other little girls you might have a little *boy*?—just *one*?” said Dorcas, in a sugared insinuating tone.

“Don’t speak of it. I would cut him up into mincemeat if he came.”

“Oh, you wouldn’t!”

“Yes—and put salt and pepper to him, and make him into sausages.”

“Then you’d be hung!”

“What—just for making mincemeat of a little boy? I am sure *you* wouldn’t hang me for that, Dorty?”

“No, no—not *me*,”—hesitating a little.

“But somebody else would.”

“Then you would have to go to somebody else, and ask them not to do it. You would have to go to the queen, and tell her that if she wouldn’t hang me I would promise never to make little-boy sausages any more.”

“But perhaps you’d break your promise?”

And Dorcas lifted up a severe face, and fixed eyes of such judicial suspicion on her father that, half with a laugh, half with a momentary twinge of pain, he brought the foolish talk to an end.

She was, you see, a clear-headed little maid,—not one who was accustomed to let her feelings run away with her, or to allow sentiment to get the upper hand of reason. Sometimes, I think, in spite of all his devotion to her, Mr. Trelawney came on hard bits in his little daughter that made him wince. “She will not be taken in easily,” he would say at moments with a laugh. Often he would watch her demure and composed ways, and wonder what strength of feeling lay beneath the calm and rather cold exterior. In person she was like his mother—a dainty, pretty, rather Quaker-like little face and figure ; he wondered if in character she would prove like his mother too ; and perhaps, though half unconsciously, or at least unwillingly, a certain reluctance to believe it probable would mingle with his speculations. For his mother had been a woman of many virtues and of few faults, but looking back now on the days

when they had lived together he occasionally found himself questioning whether warm blood could ever have flowed in her calm veins,—whether in all her life her pulses could ever have beaten fast.

“If Dorcas could be like her in some ways,” he would say to himself, “I should desire nothing better. My mother’s calm sense and strength of mind, joined with the warmth and breadth of nature that I think I see in Dorcas, would make an almost perfect woman.” And in happy faith he used to watch the little maid, believing that he could already perceive the seeds of all goodness and nobleness in this child of his, with her quiet, self-possessed ways, and her grave, observant eyes.

“Dorcy’s eyes are like two little stars, that watch—and watch,” he said to her, tenderly, once, and drew her to his side and kissed them shut.

Such happy walks these two used to take together! With her mother Dorcas went very little out of doors, except into the garden, but her father and she in summer would ramble half their time away, and even in winter there were few days when they failed to secure an hour or two in the open air. They used to have endless interests in these expeditions of theirs. Holding his hand demurely as she walked beside him, Dorcas would ask him questions without number; scarcely a flower by the roadside did she pass unnoticed; scarcely a bird sang in the trees or insect hummed in the air but she wanted to know its name and history; she picked up pebbles in the road, which he had to carry home for future study; she required a reason and a meaning for everything she saw, such as it taxed him to the utmost, and often quite beyond his power, to supply.

They used to sit down in the woods and meadows, and then she would make him tell her fairy stories—or, rather, they would make up tales together—both bringing material out of their own fancy, and joining it all together into a rambling medley of nonsense, whose absurdity and want of coherence, perhaps, almost made part of its charm to her.

“I wonder if the fairies are all about us here just now,” she said to him one day, “crouching in amongst the leaves, and listening to us when we’re talking. I dare say they are—don’t you? Or perhaps all the little birds are fairies,—and the fishes in the water,—and the gnats and flies. I think the gnats are just like little tiny fairies, and when we say something they don’t like they come and nip us. Do you think, if we came one night very, very late in the moonlight,

we should find them all dressed in green, and dancing on the grass?"

"Well, Dorthy, I don't know," he answered. "When you are a bigger girl we had better come some night, perhaps, and see."

"But if we came we should have to hide ourselves. I think we'd have to climb up into a tree, and cover ourselves with leaves, and lie as still as mice."

"And then the fairies, perhaps, would stop their dancing, and begin to sniff into the air, and presently one of them would say—'I smell some human beings about here!'"

"Oh, shouldn't we begin to tremble when we heard that! I'd throw my arms round you, and almost tumble down, and you'd have to hold me fast. And then——?"

"Well, I suppose, then they would walk up and down, and go in and out, and keep

smelling first one way and then the other——”

“Yes—and they wouldn’t be able to find us a bit, because we’d be covered so well with leaves ; and then they would go at last to the king and queen, and they would come with their big crowns on——”

“And their sceptres in their hands——”

“And trains all made of gold and crimson—oh ! and the queen’s dress all covered with stars——”

“And the king would call out in a terrible voice—‘Mortals, wherever you are, come forth!’”

“Yes—but we wouldn’t move one bit.”

“No, we wouldn’t move willingly, but we should be trembling so with fright by this time, that we should be making all the tree shake.”

“Oh, dear ! And then the king would call out, ‘What’s that?’”

“And the little fairies would say, ‘It’s only the wind, your majesty.’”

“But the king wouldn’t believe it was the wind.”

“No ; the king would put on his spectacles, and look straight up into the tree ; and first he would put his head at one side, and then at the other side, and then, all in a moment,—‘I see them !’ he would cry out.”

“Oh ! and then I should scream !”

“Yes, and as soon as the fairies heard you scream they would all be so frightened that they would fall flat on the ground, as if they had been shot.”

“Oh, dear !—and what after that ?”

“Well, let me see ; after that, I suppose, the doctor would have to come and give them smelling-salts ; and then, when they had got on their legs again, they would all begin to swarm up the tree just like ants.”

“And we should be lying shaking.”

“No; I think, when we saw them running up the tree, *we* should have to get upon our legs too, because we should have to fight them, you see.”

“We’d pull down branches from the trees and make swords of them.”

“Yes; and as we went slashing away we would shout at the tops of our voices, till we frightened them out of their wits.”

“Poor little fairies! And they would go tumbling down, and fall on the grass quite dead.”

“But as fast as they tumbled down new ones would come, and we should have to fight hard the whole night long—till at last the cocks would begin to crow. And then, all in an instant——”

“Oh! all in an instant they’d fly away—away like birds.”

“And Dorty would find herself—where, does she think?”

“ I don’t know. Where ?”

“ Well, I am not quite sure, but I *rather* think she would find herself sleepily opening her eyes, and turning herself round in her own little bed.”

Was it possible that Mr. Trelawney had come to spend hours every day talking nonsense like this to a little six-year-old child ? He would often, even to himself, laugh at the thought of it. “ But I cannot help it. The little soul expects me to play with her,” he would say, in half jesting self-excuse. She expected it, and so he must humour her : children must play, and Dorcas had no companion besides himself (except her mother, of course ; but somehow they neither of them thought much of Letty for a playfellow). So he talked nonsense to her, and played games with her, and they ran races together in the fields ; and the grave student, whose life till now had been

spent amongst his books, became accustomed at command to leave his desk that he might walk on all fours round his study floor, in abject imitation of some lion or tiger roaming in its native woods.

He was occasionally half ashamed of these strange occupations to which he had descended. One day, when Mr. Gibson came to see him, and, being ushered unexpectedly into the room, found his friend barricaded and growling in one corner of it, enacting a wild beast in its den, Mr. Trelawney leapt to his feet, and burst from his imprisonment with his face on fire.

“I was—I was only playing with that silly child. One has to make a fool of oneself sometimes,” he blurted out, apologetically, with an embarrassed laugh. And, though the other answered emphatically that he could not do a better thing, Mr. Trelawney was disturbed all through the visit, and

after this time often locked his study door when the little one and he were engaged together at their games, shrinking uncontrollably, in his shy reserve, from letting the eye of any stranger see him at his childish play.

“Are we going to have a walk to-day?” he said, on this May morning to Dorcas. “Shall we go to the river, and see if the fish have got anything to say to us? I think, if mamma were to put on your hat as soon as dinner was over, we might stay out all the afternoon—and we might take our reading-book with us, Dorthy, and see what a clever girl we could make you before we came home again.”

“And we can play at lions and lambs,” answered Dorthy, prudently declining to give any sign of having heard the latter part of her father’s speech. “You shall be a great big bad lion, and I will be a dear little tiny

lamb, and you will have to make believe to eat me right up."

"Very well. I'll eat you right up—boots and buttons and all."

"But I'm to be a lamb. I shan't have any buttons."

"Oh, I forgot. Then I'll eat your wool, and your thick skin, and your little short tail."

"Yes—and we'll stop out till tea time—won't we?"

"I shouldn't wonder that we might."

"And I'll finish dolly's frock, and then she'll have a clean one to pnt on, and she can come with us."

"Well—I wouldn't mind much about that. I think the lion would frighten dolly. If I were you I would put her to bed, and let her go to sleep there, and keep out of mischief."

"But don't you think she'll be dull?"

“Not a bit of it.”

“And then I can finish her frock to-morrow?”

“Exactly—and all her other garments. So now trot away and dispose of her—and then you will be ready for your dinner and your walk.”

## CHAPTER II.

IT had, somehow, come to be a custom that they never asked Letty to accompany them when they went out walking. Perhaps none of them knew why she never went with them, but it was an understood thing—an arrangement that they all accepted tacitly.

“I don’t go out much beyond the garden. I don’t know why—but I never do,” Letty herself would merely say occasionally, when some one perhaps would take notice to her of how the child seemed to be always with its father. “Mr. Trelawney and Dorcas, they like long walks together ; but I’m not

very much of a walker now. I'm fondest of the garden—just of looking after the flowers, and weeding and watering; and the little one has got her watering-pot too, and she comes along with me sometimes—and we're very happy together," poor Letty would say, trying, from instinctive pride and loyalty, to hide from her interlocutors that there was any sense of soreness in her heart.

And, in truth, that poor weak heart of hers, if it ached a little for any neglect that was shown her, at any rate harboured no bitterness in it. The child seemed to her always to belong so much more to her husband than herself. She was like his mother, he often said; she had such pretty, dainty, lady-like ways: she was not like Letty, or Letty's folk.

"I sometimes feel almost as if I hadn't brought her into the world at all," Letty

would say wistfully to Mrs. Markham, when occasionally her aunt came to visit her. "I sit and look at her, and feel as if she wasn't mine at all. And *she* feels it too—that's the strange thing—and she so young. She'll come to me for any little thing that I can do for her, but, when she's got it, it's her father that she'll go and stop with. She never stops with me."

"Not that I want her to love him less," she would add, quickly, a moment afterwards. "I'm proud of her loving him—only—if she cared a little for me too! for it's hard to go yearning all day long, and day after day, and never to get a warm kiss from her or a tender word. She's not naughty with me; I'm not saying that: she's a good child; but if she would be bad sometimes, and cry and put her arms about my neck afterwards, it would be easier to bear, I think."

And then the tears would come to Letty's own eyes, perhaps, and she would wipe them away as she made her gentle lament.

She only used to make it to Mrs. Markham, or sometimes to Elizabeth; never to her husband.

"He'd think I was complaining, and be vexed with me," she would say to herself; "and he's so happy with the child I wouldn't like to cross his pleasure, and set him thinking of me, when his thinking perhaps could do no good. I'll not be a drag upon him, as far as Dorthy's concerned, at any rate. I'm drag enough in other ways."

And so she would hold her peace before her husband, doing her best, not without a kind of feeble heroism, to bear the little trouble of her lot.

She stood in the sunshine to-day, watching Dorcas and her father as they went

hand in hand along the road. She had crossed the garden with them, and then stood looking after them, leaning on the garden gate. Her husband turned back once and nodded her a good-bye, but the child was chattering and did not think of her.

“We’ll go straight to the river—won’t we?” Dorcas had begun to say. “We’re going there first, and then we’ll go and be lions. Look—I’ve got a new frock on. It’s a pretty frock, isn’t it? as pretty as dolly’s will be, and it washes. *Your* clothes don’t wash,” said Dorcas, looking with some contempt on those inferior garments.

It was a pretty river, winding with its bright band of silver through the meadows,—with thick woods coming down here and there to the water’s edge,—with sedges and bulrushes growing freely on its banks. A good river for some kinds of fish, so that anglers

came often to it : there were some there to-day, patiently plying their craft.

Mr. Trelawney and Dorcas sat down for a long time, and watched the rippling of the water, and the flashing of the sunbeams on it, and talked together—of the birds that flew past above their heads—of the wild ducks skimming along the surface of the water—of the cows that came slowly along the meadow, and down to the river's edge to drink. Lazily they came, and lazily stood drinking for a little while, and then one after the other they plunged into the water, and swam to the opposite bank ; and Dorcas broke into a shout of delighted childish laughter. A clear, ringing, contagious laugh. The pair of anglers, who were not far off, heard it and laughed too. They were a man and a boy, father and son, perhaps ; strangers they seemed to be.

It had been a calm morning, but the

wind began presently rather suddenly to rise, and came fresh across the water, and blew the thick brown hair that was kept short cropped like a boy's into Dorcas's eyes.

"I think it will be nicer amongst the trees," she said, presently. "It's such a tiresome wind, scattering all my hairs about."

There was a wood close to them—a long belt of trees skirting the river, with a grass-grown walk running through it from end to end. They had only to cross the meadow to reach it, and then to jump a little fence, the climbing over which was always, to Dorcas, an act of extreme delight. The matter was managed invariably with rigid adherence to rule. First Mr. Trelawney mounted the rails, and, with varying grace, descended on the other side; then Dorcas commenced the ascent, silently, with a grave and absorbed face, accepting little

assistance till she had reached the summit of the small erection, when suddenly she would give a spring and come down with a happy laugh into her father's outstretched arms.

They went across the meadow, and when they had reached the fence, "Now get over," Dorcas said, and—eager for her own performance—scarcely waited till her father's feet had reached the ground on the other side before, with her usual caution, she began to mount.

But, cautious as she was, she had an enemy to-day to do battle with who in one respect got the better of her, for just as she had reached the top rail, and was about to jump, the wind caught her light straw hat off her head, and in a moment whirled it out of reach—a score of feet away.

"Oh!" cried Dorcas at this catastrophe, not giving her jump, but tumbling back instead on the wrong side; and then she

began to run, but the hat ran faster than she did, and—as though from pure mischief and delight in baffling her—not only ran, but suddenly, with a wild leap in the air, tossed itself into the river, and went bounding away on the water like a boat.

Dorcas gave another cry of distress, but her cry was checked the next moment by a pleasant, boyish voice.

“Don’t be afraid. I’ll get it back for you,” the friendly voice called out, and the younger of the two anglers came running up, fishing-rod in hand. “I’ll get it in a moment,” he repeated, cheerily, and threw out his line; but the line was just too short, and the triumphant hat sailed past untouched.

“Oh, you can’t do it!” exclaimed Dorcas then. “It’ll go right over to the other side, I do believe,—just like the cows.”

“That it shan’t!” returned the other, and

suddenly plunged into the river, and in two or three moments more the runaway hat was arrested, and brought to land.

“I am afraid you have given yourself a wetting,” Mr. Trelawney said, reaching the scene of action just as the capture had been made, and looking—not perhaps with specially pleased eyes—at the pair of legs before him that were dripping down water on the grass. “Neither you nor your trousers will be the better for this sort of bath, my young friend.”

“Oh! my trousers will dry again,” the lad answered, with a laugh and a blush; but his companion, coming up too at this moment, glanced at him and shook his head.

“Boys don’t think much of the chances of rheumatism—do they?” he said, raising his hat to Mr. Trelawney. “And perhaps

it is just as well in a general way—only this youngster has been ill of late, and so I don't think he is exactly the subject at present to be sitting in wet clothes." And then he turned to the boy, and said—"You will have to come away with me, my lad, and see if they can give you a fire at the inn to dry yourself."

"I am very sorry that we should have been the cause of giving you so much needless trouble," Mr. Trelawney had begun quickly, in a tone of annoyance—when the boy interrupted him in his frank, pleasant voice.

"Oh, it wasn't a bit of trouble. I liked it, sir," he said. "I'll run to the inn, and get dried in half an hour—if my father really thinks I must?" and he gave a momentary glance of inquiry into the other's face, as though for his own part he

would have been content to stand dripping like a merman, in happy faith that no harm would ensue.

“If it is necessary to go somewhere, you had better come home with me,” Mr. Trelawney said, reluctantly, and with rather cold politeness. “The inn is a mile away; my house is just there—behind the trees. As we have been the cause of your mishap, we ought to do our best to remedy it.”

“Well, if you will kindly give us the use of a fire for half an hour—” the elder of the strangers said, a little haughtily; and then, when they had gathered up their fishing-tackle, and had begun to walk, “I think I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Trelawney, have I not?” he suddenly asked. “My friend, Mr. Warburton, was pointing out your house to me the other day as we passed it, and telling me of your fine library.

That is always an interesting subject to me, for I am something of a book-collector myself."

"My library is not a large one, but I shall be happy to show it to you while your son gets his clothes dried," Mr. Trelawney said.

Perhaps he did not care for his companion much as they walked across the fields together. He had a cold and supercilious manner. He was a tall man, and he bore himself as though he thought that, in other matters besides that of bodily height, he towered above the common creatures of creation. His name was Harcourt, he told Mr. Trelawney; and Mr. Trelawney smiled to himself, for he had heard of these Harcourts before, who were connections of the Warburtons, and who prided themselves on their blue blood.

"I'm afraid your hat's spoilt, isn't it?"

the lad said to Dorcas, glancing at it as she trotted along with it, holding it in her hand.

"I don't know," returned Dorcas, demurely.

(Dorcas had been rather struck dumb by the unexpected nature of this little incident that had happened, and, being in the habit of seeing few strangers, had not yet fully recovered her powers of speech.)

"You will have to take the ribbon off it, I should say, and put on something else," said the lad.

"Mamma only trimmed it yesterday!" ejaculated Dorcas, rather mournfully.

"Did she? Oh, that's a pity! But perhaps she'll be able to do something to it to set it right. Mothers, you know, can do all kinds of things."

"Can they?" said Dorcas, to whom this was quite a new doctrine.

"Yes. Don't you think they can?"

"Not as much as fathers do," said Dorcas, with decision.

"Oh, *I* don't think that at all." And the lad gave a quick laugh. "*My* mother does lots of things for me. I say, is that your house over there?"

"Yes," said Dorcas.

"You don't live in a very big one."

This was a fact that Dorcas had never yet taken into consideration, so, rather startled by the frankness with which it was put before her, she had to pause before a suitable answer occurred to her, and meantime the boy went on—

"I daresay it's very nice though. I like little houses—sometimes. I suppose you don't live here all the year round?"

"Yes, we do," said Dorcas, wondering at the question.

"Oh; that seems funny! *We're* always

going about—from one place to another. At least, my father and mother are. *I'm* at school," said the boy, with dignity.

"Where do you go to school?" asked Dorcas, a little shyly. (She supposed it must be at Mr. Turner's, down in Shepton; only, if he was one of Mr. Turner's boys, she wondered how she had never seen him at church on Sundays.)

"I'm at Eton," answered the boy.

"O—h," said Dorcas, gaining no enlightenment from that response; upon which the other laughed, and said—

"You never heard of Eton, I suppose? It's a very big school—the biggest school you ever saw in your life, and people know about it all over the world. I dare-say you will come and see it some day."

"I should like to," said Dorcas, earnestly.

"Well, come while I'm there, and I'll show it all to you. I'm not there just at

present, you see. That's because I've been ill."

"Were you *very* ill?" asked Dorcas, in rather an awed tone.

"Oh yes, I suppose I was. But I don't know much about it. Look there,—there's somebody coming," he said, for their young feet had outstripped those of the other two, and they were close now to Mr. Trelawney's garden-gate; and just a little way within the garden Letty was standing, watching with some surprise the advance of this unknown companion that her child was bringing home.

"That's mamma," said Dorcas, quickly, and she ran forward, leaving the boy to follow her.

"Mamma, he went into the water to fetch out my hat,—and he's all wet,—and papa says he's to be dried," she began to explain hurriedly.

The others were only a few yards behind, and they all came up before Dorcas had made herself clearly understood. Mr. Trelawney muttered an introduction to his wife, and Mr. Harcourt took off his hat to Letty, and began rather loftily to apologise for the trouble they were giving her. He was not a man whose manner set timid people at their ease, and Letty, to her husband's annoyance, blushed at his address, and became almost tongue-tied. The grandeur of her visitor awed her, and she let it be seen that she was awed.

"Oh, pray don't say anything. I'm sure it is *we* who ought to be sorry. I'm so vexed the—the young gentleman has got himself wet," she could only murmur nervously, betraying by her awkward shyness all that at the moment Mr. Trelawney felt he would have most wished to hide.

"Well, we can apologise to one another

presently. Let our first business be to get the boy into a pair of dry trousers," he said, quickly, with hardly restrained impatience, and began to lead the way to the house. "You must make the best you can of such garments as I can lend you. They will be half a foot too long for you, but you can turn them up at the heels," he said bluntly to the lad.

He sent Letty upstairs to provide the needed clothes, and himself stayed below with Mr. Harcourt. Poor Letty was ill-calculated to entertain this fine gentleman, and he was conscious of her unfitness to do it with a rather sharp and irritated consciousness.

"Will you come this way?" he said, and led his guest into the study, and shut the door upon him there. The man, he suspected, was a mere *dilettante*, yet he must at least know enough of books to enable

him to talk about them for half an hour.

“I wish I had something better than these to give you, but you see I have nothing here except Mr. Trelawney’s clothes,” Letty said to the boy, in her gentle, apologetic way, looking in his face as she tendered him the garments that she had selected for his use.

It was a bright, frank face, and something in it, as she looked at it, made her smile. The boy did not frighten her as his father did.

“Oh, they’ll do capitally. It wouldn’t be half the fun if they were the right size,” he answered, with his pleasant laugh.

And then, when, five minutes afterwards, he came, re-habilitated, downstairs, though Letty met him on the stairs’ foot, and would have taken the wetted garments from him, he insisted, with boyish eager-

ness, on carrying them to the kitchen fire with his own hand.

“Oh ! I’ll take them ; don’t you trouble yourself. That’s the way to the kitchen, isn’t it ? What a jolly kitchen !” he exclaimed ; and he stood in the doorway, and nodded at Elizabeth, who was carrying a leg of mutton in a saucepan, as if he had known her half his life.

They all went into the kitchen together— young Harcourt, Letty,—Dorcas, with a roused and eager face.

“What a nice fire ; they’ll dry here like smoke !” said the lad.

“Yes, only you mustn’t put them too close,” cried Letty, and, laughing, drew back the clothes-horse that he was pushing to within a foot of the grate. “You should never try to make things dry too fast.”

“I didn’t know that. I thought the faster the better ?”

“ Oh no !”

“ They *are* well soaked, aren't they ?”

“ It was so good of you to go into the water after my little girl's hat,—only I'm sure it wasn't worth it.”

“ Oh, it was jolly ! *I* thought it was worth it. I'd have swum right across the river, if I couldn't have got it without.”

Dorcas gave a little laugh, and he turned at once to her.

“ *You* would have liked to have seen me, I know. If I'd done it, you would have shouted, just as you did at the cows.”

“ Oh, mamma, it was so funny about the cows !” said Dorcas.

Dorcas was a little shy yet of this new-made friend. She stood by her mother's side, holding her hand for protection, while she looked at him with her large observant eyes.

“ Should you like to go to your papa

now?" Letty said, presently. "Or would you rather go into the garden?" she added, after a moment, a little timidly, for the boy did not appear to catch at her proposal that he should join his father very readily. "There would be no one to see you out there—I mean to see how you're dressed, and Dorcas might show you about the place."

"Yes, I'd like that," said the lad. "But what did you call her?—Dorcas? Is that her name?"

"Yes,—Dorcas."

"What a funny name for anything of her age! Oh, I beg your pardon. I only mean that it makes one think of old women."

"But old women, if they are called Dorcas, must have been called Dorcas just the same when they were young," said Letty, with some reason.

“Oh, yes, to be sure they must—only somehow— Oh, but I do really rather like it. It’s only that it seems odd just at first. I think it’s rather nice to have an odd name. *I* haven’t. I’m only Frank.”

“But that is a very pretty name,” said Letty.

“Is it? I don’t know. It doesn’t seem particularly pretty to me; but I daresay it will do well enough. And so—shall we come into the garden now? I should like to go, if she—if Dorcas would take me.”

They looked rather an odd pair as they stepped out together into the open air: the girl in her neat frock, with dainty little booted and white-stockinged feet, the boy shambling by her side in the trousers and slippers of a man. Dorcas laughed as she looked at him, and then coloured because she had laughed.

“You’re thinking that I am a guy, aren’t

you? Well, you are not far wrong," he exclaimed, replying good-humouredly to her laughter; "but *I* don't mind, if *you* don't. I'd rather be here than over there where you found us, for we had been at it for a couple of hours, and had not had so much as a bite. I think fishing is dull work when you don't catch any fish."

"*I* think it's a nasty, cruel thing to fish at all," said Dorcas, severely. "Papa never does, and I never mean to either."

"Well, but *somebody* must do it," returned Frank, bluntly. "You don't think we're to leave all the fish in the rivers, and make no use of them, do you?"

To this question Dorcas was not prepared with an answer, so she dexterously moved the conversation to a different topic.

"There are going to be such heaps and heaps of strawberries," she said. "Don't

you wish they were ripe? Have you many strawberries at—at your house?”

The boy gave a little laugh. “Oh, yes—lots,” he answered, carelessly. “We’ve got all sorts of fruits.”

“Then you’ve a very big garden?”

“Pretty big.”

“And nice flowers too?”

“Yes, no end of flowers.”

“As many as *we* have?” said Dorcas, innocently; and then the boy laughed again.

“Oh, our gardens are not like yours at all. They’re quite different places—more like Mr. Warburton’s. You know Mr. Warburton’s—don’t you?” he said.

“Oh! yes,” said Dorcas, opening her eyes.

“Well, they’re that sort of thing.”

“And do you live in a big house like that?”

"Yes, something like that. At least, we have one big house, and two smaller ones. And then we have a house in London."

"Oh!" said Dorcas, and subsided into surprised silence.

She would have liked to ask him some further questions, but his last communications had rather brought back her shyness. At six years old we may not know much about wealth and social position, yet even that early age is not altogether an age of innocence, and Dorcas had at least a vague perception that the men who live in great houses are not quite the same as other men.

Had she not seen Mr. Warburton's little boys and girls, and known that they were not companions for her? As they drove past her in their carriage, or walked into church through the meek curtsies of the old

women at the door, had she ever thought of wishing that they could be her play-fellows? She was too young to comprehend or even to wonder about the matter, but the Warburtons were the great people of the parish, and in some partial degree at least she had taken in that knowledge as she took in the air she breathed. So she felt rather shy again as she walked on by Frank Harcourt's side.

"I don't know where you'd like to go," she said all at once, breaking a little silence that had fallen between them. "We've got some cocks and hens, but I don't know if you'd care to see them; and we have a cow——"

"Oh, we've had cows enough for to-day. We've seen seven cows, you know, swim across a river," the lad interrupted, laughing. "No, I don't care much about the cocks and hens, and those things, but I'll tell you

what I *should* like ; I can't get on in these shoes very well, but I should like to sit down there under that tree, and have a jolly talk."

"Would you?" exclaimed Dorcas, brightening. "Oh, I should like that too."

"Come along then, and I'll tell you a lot of things. You haven't got any brothers, have you?"

"No," said Dorcas.

"Well, I thought you hadn't, because you couldn't have brothers, you see, and not know about Eton. I'll tell you something about Eton now, if you like."

"Oh, will you?" cried Dorcas, gratefully.

"Yes, as much as ever you'd care to hear."

And then Mr. Frank Harcourt leant back against the tree at whose base he had placed himself, and, happy in the possession of an interested listener, began to talk.

They sat together for nearly an hour : the boy pouring forth, the girl asking questions. At the hour's end a call came for them from the house.

"That lad seems to think he is going to spend the rest of the day here," Mr. Harcourt was saying, as he stood at the hall door, with a rather hard and scornful laugh. "He is taking his ease, I think." And he watched the two children for a few minutes before he called to Frank.

"How long do you think it takes to dry a pair of trousers, my boy?" he asked, as the lad came up. "I have been waiting for you for this last half hour."

"I didn't know you were waiting for me, sir. I won't keep you a moment," Frank said.

He ran upstairs and dressed himself. He met Letty in the hall as he came down

again, and thanked her for the clothes she had lent him with the boyish ease and grace that seemed to come to him so naturally. Then they all stood together talking for a few moments before they bade one another good-bye.

The unexpected visit had been but a small incident—the accident of an hour—a thing that in an active life would have been forgotten almost as soon as it was past; but in this quiet existence of the Trelawneys incidents happened rarely, and when their guests were gone somehow each one, in his or her degree, felt that it was difficult to go back at once to the occupations that had been interrupted: in Mr. Trelawney's mind there was a certain consciousness of irritation; in the minds of Letty and Dorcas a sense of excitement; in Dorcas's alone perhaps a vague feeling of expectancy. Had not this afternoon's

companionship been something new and delightful to her?—a pleasure hitherto untasted?—a thing she longed to taste again?

“Are we going to try once more now to get our walk, Dorthy?” her father said to her, and she answered “Yes,” readily, and they went out again together; but, though she held his hand and trotted by his side, she asked him none of the questions that she was so fond of asking usually; she appealed to him for no fairy-story; the little mind had got filled with novel and absorbing thoughts, and, as they rambled beneath the trees, it was only of Frank Harcourt that she talked, and of the things that Frank had told her.

I am afraid the repetition of all the wonders she had heard pleased herself more than it pleased her father.

“Your new friend seems to be an amaz-

ing chatterbox, Dorthy," he said once. "I don't know how he can have contrived to tell you so much in so short a time; it would give me a headache, I am afraid, to listen to him."

He laughed as he spoke, and the child laughed too; but his was rather a sadder laugh than hers.

"Oh, it didn't give *me* a headache. I liked it," she answered, in all simplicity.

## CHAPTER III.

“**Y**ES, they are staying with the Warburtons; they are connections of theirs, I believe. I am just as well pleased that it won't fall in our way to have anything more to do with them, for the man is rather a pompous fool,” Mr. Trelawney said to Letty, when he and Dorcas came in from their walk; and he went into his study and sat down, and half consciously thanked God that he had washed his hands of Mr. Harcourt.

For the little event of the day had ruffled him more than it ought to have ruffled him; but the thing was past now; there was an end of it; they were not likely to see these

people again, he said to himself; and so (not allowing in words that he was jealous, yet knowing in his heart how jealous he really was) he set himself this evening to win back the heart of his little daughter, and try to make her forget the companion whose conversation had opened the gate of a new world for her.

But he might have spared himself his trouble, for next morning, as he was sitting at his desk, he heard a footstep coming lightly along the gravel path, and, looking up, his face clouded as he perceived young Harcourt.

“What the devil does that boy want here again?” were the first irritated words that at the sight rose to his lips.

Dorcas was not in the room with him. A few seconds after he saw the lad he heard her little high-pitched voice talking to him in the hall.

The boy had come up, doffing his cap, and greeting her with his light, pleasant laugh.

“I daresay you wonder what I’m here for again so soon?” he said. “And *I* didn’t expect to be back so quickly either when I said good-bye yesterday ; but there was a knife I had in my trousers’ pocket——”

Letty had heard the talking, and came forward at this moment.

“Oh yes, I have just found it,—not yet ten minutes ago,” she said, “and I was wondering how I was to get it sent back to you. Come in. I found it on the floor upstairs. Come in, and I will bring it to you.”

She liked this lad with his bright face ; there was something about it and him that was curiously pleasant to her.

“You must want a rest after your walk. Come in and sit down,” she said, and took him into her drawing-room.

"I didn't want to lose the knife, because my mother gave it to me," the lad said, quickly; "and I thought you would be sure to have found it, so it was worth coming for. And I wanted to know how Dorcas's hat was, too, this morning, you know," he said, with a laugh.

He was very ready to sit down, and quite ready presently to eat the cake and drink the milk that Letty brought him. Nor did he seem in any hurry to depart. When Letty regretted once that he had had the trouble of coming for his knife himself he answered eagerly that he was very glad to come for it, for he had so little to do, and it was so dull at Woodlands.

"There's nobody there to talk to," he said.

He looked at Dorcas as he spoke. The two young things had drawn insensibly near to one another. He had his knife still in

his hand, and Dorcas had begun to look at it with interested eyes.

“You don’t know what a lot of things there are here together,” he said, suddenly. “Come, and I’ll show them to you.”

She stood by his side, and asked him questions, and broke into expressions of amazement and delight as he opened out corkscrews and blades and gimlets for her wondering inspection. So astounding a combination of instruments she never had before beheld; her father’s penknife with its simple couple of blades sank into contemptuous nothingness beside it. With almost a look of reverence in her face she raised her eyes to the happy possessor of so rare an object.

“It must be very nice to have such things,” she said, with a sigh of the keenest appreciation.

“Yes—I like knives,” answered the boy,

heartily. "But they wouldn't be any use to you—at least, not one of this sort, I mean."

"No—I suppose not," answered Dorcas, humbly.

"I don't know how it is, but girls never seem to know what to do with knives. It's funny— isn't it? I do think they're often as much afraid of them as if they were guns, and they expected them to go off. Do you know, by the way, I've got such a jolly gun?"

"Have you?" cried Dorcas, opening her eyes wide, with increasing admiration.

"Yes—such a beauty. I'd like to show it to you."

"And what do you do with it?" asked Dorcas.

"Oh, shoot with it, of course. I can't shoot very well yet, but my father's a splendid shot. You should just see him."

"I don't like people to shoot," said Dorcas.

"Don't you? Oh, you will have to give all that up." And the boy laughed.

"But it's so dreadful to have the dear little birdies killed."

"Well, I suppose it is—only there are such lots of them, you know, that we can't let them all live."

Upon which Dorcas murmured "Oh!" doubtfully, and said no more. (All through her little life, up to this time, Dorcas had very gravely believed that it was a wicked thing to kill fish and birds, but, if Frank Harcourt thought differently, was it—was it possible that the doing of these things was not so wrong as she had supposed?)

Letty had gone away and left the children together for a little while, and when she came back to the room she found it empty. They had gone together into the garden,

and a little later she went out too, and found them playing at bowls upon the grass. The boy came forward quickly when he saw her, laughing, and blushing too.

“I hope you don’t mind my stopping a little while—do you?” he said. “I was only having a game with Dorcas; but I’ll go at once if she has anything else to do.”

“Oh, no. Stay and have your game,” Letty answered, cordially. She could not be anything but kind to this lad with his sunny face: she half feared that her husband did not like him, and that he was vexed because he had repeated his visit, and yet she could not be cold to him. “Dorcas will be going to her papa presently, but she’ll be delighted to have a game with you first. She so seldom has a playfellow,” she said, and put a friendly hand for a moment on Frank’s shoulder as he stood beside her.

The lad stayed for a couple of hours, and

then with evident reluctance bade them good-bye.

“I hope you will let me come again?” he said frankly to Letty before he went.

Letty had gone to the study a little while after he arrived, and Mr. Trelawney had impatiently asked her what the boy had come back about; but when she told him he closed his lips and spoke no further word, and she could not tell, except by instinct, that he was vexed. When Frank, as he was going, asked her if he might come back, perhaps she excused herself for saying “Yes” to him on the plea that her husband had been silent.

But indeed what other reply than yes *could* she have made to him? “I could not tell him not to come,” she said, gently, to Mr. Trelawney afterwards. “I was sorry when he asked me, but how could I say anything to him but what I did?”

It was on the occasion of Frank Harcourt's third visit to the house that she said this to her husband. This third visit had followed very quickly on the second. There had been one day's interval, and then the young eager steps had come bounding up the garden path again.

"Oh, there is Frank!" cried Dorcas, seeing him this time from the study window; and she sprang up from her seat, and ran out to the door to let him in. She had no look or word for her father as she flew out of the room: she had not had much thought for her father at all, I am afraid, during these two last days.

It was all quite natural at Dorcas's age that the new sudden interest should absorb and extinguish the old; but natural things are, nevertheless, sometimes very bitter to bear, and, as the joyful little steps hurried away, a pang shot through the father's heart. Dur-

ing these six years that he had had her to himself he had lapped himself, I suppose, in some fond conceits : perhaps he had almost come to believe that he was as necessary to Dorcas as Dorcas was to him ; and now he had to learn how light a thing a child's love is—how she could throw him from her in a moment for the excitement of a new face.

“I’ve come again, you see !” Frank said, joyfully. “I wanted to come yesterday, only I had to go somewhere with my father, so I couldn’t. But I *was* sorry, I can tell you. And look, I’ve brought my fishing things with me now, and I thought if you’d nothing else to do perhaps your mother would let you come down to the river with me, and then I’d teach you how to fish,—for you know it’s all nonsense about fishing being cruel—that’s all humbug!” cried the lad, with his bright, persuasive face.

Upon which, the love of pleasure entirely

overcoming her (or, should I rather say, the love of Frank ?) Dorcas, in a moment, let all her cherished principles go to the wind.

“ I’ll go and ask mamma ; I think she’ll let me come. I’ll come back and tell you in a minute,” she cried, and, without so much as one apparent qualm of conscience, away she ran in search of Letty.

Might she go fishing with Frank ? Frank had come to get her to go with him. Oh, she was so happy ! It would be so lovely to go with Frank !

Mr. Trelawney heard the quick steps and the joyful feet outside his study, and he half rose for a moment from his seat, and then, with a sad sense of his own folly, sat down again. After a minute Letty came into the room, and a little uncertainly asked if the child was to go.

“ I see no good in it,” he answered, quickly.

But Dorcas had come in too with her mother, and stood looking in his face with eyes filled with eager hope, and when he saw that look he had not the heart to refuse the thing she longed for.

“Do you want to go so much, Dorthy?” he asked her, suddenly. He put his hand on her head for a moment, and then gave her a quiet kiss. “Well, go, my little girl,” he said. “Let her go,” he said gently to Letty.

And so Dorcas had her first lesson in fishing, and came home brimful of delight, bringing three small fish with her too, which she fried afterwards, and which she and Frank ate together.

“The lad is very nice and pleasant. It’s only natural that she should like him,” Letty said, deprecatingly, to her husband that evening; and he assented. Yes, it was

quite natural : did he need anyone to tell him that ?—or to make him see that he was only a fool because he wanted to keep the child to himself ?

He knew he was a fool, but yet I fear that knowledge did not cure him of his folly ; it kept his lips closed, perhaps, but that was all. Many a time during these next weeks did his eyes turn longingly to the window-seat in his room that was so often empty now : many a time a feeling of loneliness and desertion came upon him as Dorcas bounded from his side to join her new friend. She had been his close, inseparable companion all her little life till now, and yet now at once, by the mere stretching out of his hand, a stranger had lured her from him, and the fresh face and the fresh voice had opened a new world for her in which *he* had no place. “ You are very fond of

your new friend, Dorthy. Is he as fond of you?" he asked the child half bitterly once.

And in truth the question was a fair one, for, though Frank Harcourt soon fell into the habit of coming to the Trelawneys' almost every day, it must be confessed that it was Dorcas's devotion to him, not his to Dorcas, that quickly became the most apparent fact. Frank liked the little maid, indeed, but perhaps he mainly liked her because her admiration for himself was so genuine and undisguised. He was twelve years old, and at that mature age a gentleman naturally feels himself vastly the superior of a lady of six, yet at the same time not too much her superior to be flattered by her preference, and content to air his self-esteem in her society to a pretty large extent.

Was not Frank Harcourt a hero in little

Dorcas's eyes? There seemed to her nothing too great for him to do. Could he not ride, and shoot, and swim, and run? had he not fought fierce battles, and come off wounded, but victorious? did he not know Greek and Latin like her father? (the different degrees of scholarship in the two cases were naturally quite immaterial to Dorcas) and could he not tell her more amazing stories than anybody else had ever told her in all her life?

"I think you know everything," she told him once, in almost awed admiration. Upon which Frank laughed, and modestly replied, Oh, no, he had a lot of things to learn yet; but, in spite of his denial, received the compliment as one that, with a little grain of salt, he complacently felt that he deserved.

"I don't know what *you* would do if you had to learn all *we* have at school," he said.

“It would frighten you out of your wits. Just think of having to say off whole pages of Greek!” And he began to spout—

“*Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος,*”

—and so went on for twenty lines, while Dorcas listened in rapt admiration, believing that he was giving her a proof of the rarest learning.

“I suppose you could talk Greek with papa just as if it was English?” she said, gravely, when he had finished. “I wish you would do it. I should so like to hear you.”

But on this, with a little embarrassment, Frank was forced to explain that he had not as yet mastered the art of conversation in ancient Greek.

“It’s not a thing that anybody does—at least, I believe not,” he said. “I should doubt even if your father could talk in

Greek. Oh, of course—of course,” said Frank, quickly, “what *I* know of it is nothing. I mean, some people wouldn’t think anything of it. But you can’t get even to read—some of Homer—without working pretty hard, I can tell you.”

“I think you must work *dreadfully* hard,” answered Dorcas, full of sympathy, and looking tenderly into his face, as if she expected to find the marks of over-study written there.

“Oh, I daresay it’s good for me,” replied Frank, bravely—like all true heroes, scorn-  
ing to complain. “I like it, you know. I like work, and I like play—and that’s what everybody ought to do. Of course this is holiday time, and I’ve been ill, and so it’s *all* play just now; but I should get horridly tired presently if this was to go on always, you know,” he said, quite unconscious, as he poured out his artless talk, that he was

giving any small pang to the poor little feminine heart beside him.

To give him his due, he did not wound her in this way often, nor could the most observant eye have detected much sign in him that he was wearying of his time of relaxation, or that his student soul was thirsting to return to its studies. One would rather have said, indeed, that he took to idleness very kindly, and pursued such simple amusements as came in his way with a keen and lively relish.

He would walk over to the Trelawneys' on these fair May mornings with a face as bright as the sunshine, bringing pleasure always to two at least of the dwellers in that house; for Letty from the first could never resist his frank looks and cordial ways, and, as for Dorcas, the little maid was soon bound entirely captive to him. She would stand waiting for his coming at the

garden-gate; she would run out into the road to meet him; when he was with her she had ears and eyes for no other creature; if a day passed without her seeing him she was restless and fretful. She was entirely frank and unreserved in her affection for him; she would fly to him with open arms and shower caresses on him; she would secure his hand, and stick to him like a burr; coldness (and he did show her coldness sometimes) could not drive her from him, nor even repulses check her ardour.

“Dorty, let Frank alone a little,” Letty would sometimes say, half amused, half annoyed at the child’s devotion; but Dorcas, at such a request, would only look up to her friend with wistful eyes, and not loose her hold of him.

“You don’t want me to go—do you?” she would say; and when Frank answered with a laughing “Oh, no—I don’t mind,”

that careless permission to remain entirely contented her.

Like other sultans, the boy, of course, in a degree, liked this homage. No doubt it bored him sometimes, but if he went away from her to-day yawning a little, and perhaps feeling as if he had been fed with too many sugar-plums, somehow he was curiously ready to return to that meal to-morrow, and would even open his mouth pretty widely to let the sweetmeats drop in. How could he help liking her very much, and feeling very kindly to anyone who showed such early discrimination in judging of what was admirable? There was nobody up at Woodlands who admired Frank Harcourt very specially; his father's was a mind not much addicted to admiration, and still less to the expression of it; his mother was absent; the Warburtons had their own olive branches on whom to expend their enthusi-

asm ; and as for these olive branches themselves, such of them as lived at home were engaged almost all day with their governess, and somehow they had failed to take very warmly to Frank, or Frank to them.

“They’re not my sort, you see,” he told Dorcas. “They’re such stuck-up little geese ; they don’t know what fun means. I’d no more think of playing with them than—I’d think of playing with my father.”

So, on the whole, Dorcas’s worship was pleasant to Frank ; but yet, though on the whole it was pleasant, there were days when he tired of it a little, and showed that he tired of it, and these days were a sore trial to the little maid. Till now, in the deep home affections that had surrounded her, she had known no shadow of variation ; of what it was to meet warmth to-day and coldness to-morrow she had had no experi-

ence; to her innocent soul love had as yet only appeared as an unchanging thing—an equable warmth—reliable, comforting, sure as existence itself. But now, for the first time, she began, partly with amazement, partly with timid pain, to learn that there can be a regard which comes by fits and starts—which pours itself out one hour like sunshine, and in the next has gone, we know not whither—a regard which is subject to weariness, which gives place to satiety, which has to be sought for, and waited for, and is sometimes found, and often lost.

“You don’t seem to like me sometimes almost the least bit in the world,” she said one day to Frank, blurting out in that blank sentence all that the poor, sore, and astonished little maid could understand of this strange state of things.

“Well, I *don’t* like you sometimes,” he answered, frankly, to that appeal. They

had been at the river fishing together, and she, through some culpable attack of sudden weakness, had failed to secure a certain fish, and this had made him angry (naturally), and they had quarrelled a little, and then he had lain back upon the grass, and thrown away his rod, and taken no notice of her, and even snubbed her with a rather savage "Stop that !" when, after a little while, she had stolen up to him, and begun, by way of making friends again, to poke her fingers in his hair.

She drew back her hand when he repulsed her, and sat silent for a minute, and then it was after that that she made her meek complaint.

"You don't seem to like me sometimes almost the least bit in the world," she sadly said.

"Well, I *don't* like you sometimes," he replied. "I don't like you when you bother

a fellow. Why can't you let one alone?"

"But I want to talk to you," she remonstrated.

"I daresay you do," he retorted; "but *I* don't."

And then he rolled himself over, so as to set another yard of distance between them, and began to whistle; and for five more minutes she sat mute.

Perhaps she should have risen to her feet and gone away? It would have been the most dignified thing to do; but then at six years old our sense of what dignity requires from us is less keen than it becomes in after-life; so Dorcas not only sat still, but never so much as thought of doing anything else. Moreover, though Frank had rolled himself to a greater distance from her, she even so entirely overlooked that rudeness as to move after him before many minutes had passed, and to take up her place again so

close to him that, if she had dared, she could once more have begun to caress those curling locks of his; and then, after sitting quite still there for a little while, she meekly said—

“I think you might talk to me a little bit. I don’t think it’s kind to lie there, and not say one word.”

“I don’t want to be kind,” the boy replied.

But he was only half in earnest, so he looked round the next moment, and gave a little laugh.

“What a tease you are!” he exclaimed.

“But you’re so cross—and you shouldn’t be cross,” she said, pitifully.

“I’m not going to be anything else,” he replied.

“Oh, you don’t mean that!”

“Yes, I do—and I mean something else too.”

“What else?”

“That you’d better go away home.”

“Oh, Frank!”

And then there came one great look of misery into the childish eyes, before they began to swell with tears.

He looked at her, and then he gave a kick to a stone at his feet that sent it spinning into the water, and after he had done this he broke into a laugh, and sat up.

“Don’t be a baby,” he said, impatiently. “I never knew anybody like you. What’s the good of crying just because one says a word?”

“But you—but you told me to—to go home,” sobbed Dorcas.

“Well—why did you make me do it?”

“I—I didn’t!”

“Yes, you did—with bothering.”

"I'm very sorry I bothered you," said Dorcas, humbly.

"It's no good being sorry—if you do it again."

"But I'll try *not* to do it again."

"Very well. All right."

And Frank began to whistle once more, and Dorcas tried to wipe the tears away, but, though she wiped them away, fresh ones would come.

It was very easy for Frank to say "All right," and propose to end their quarrel so, but what was the good of pretending it was all right if he was not going to speak another word to her?—if he meant to do nothing but whistle, and go on throwing stones into the river?

"I'm so sorry I didn't catch the fish," Dorcas said presently, in her meekest tone.

"Oh, bother the fish!" responded Frank.

"What's the good of going back upon that?"

"Because you're cross about it."

"I wasn't thinking about it one bit. Now that's so like a girl!" cried Frank, scornfully. "I was no more thinking of the fish than of the moon!"

"Well, I thought you were."

"Then you thought wrong—and if you don't stop crying I'll never let you fish with me again."

"Oh, please don't say that!" And in her weak humility Dorcas came close to him, and ventured to steal an arm about his neck.

He was good enough to submit to this caress (though not to return it), and, after she had rubbed her chin over his shoulder for a minute, he even condescended to utter a few placable words.

"Well, I don't *want* not to let you come

again. I only want you to stop crying, and be nice," he said.

"Yes, I know, and—and I *have* stopped," said Dorcas, ignoring, however, two rebellious tears that insisted, at the moment of her uttering those last words, on rolling down her cheeks.

"I do hate girls to cry—or anybody."

"I won't do it any more!" And Dorcas sat erect, and did her very utmost to put on a valiant face.

And then gradually the young sultan was pleased to take her into favour again, and the storm passed, and the sunshine came back.

It would be hard to tell what was the secret of Frank's influence over Dorcas, and how it was that he could so easily melt that little heart of hers, which to most other people, till now, had seemed somewhat cold and hard. It was seldom

indeed that Letty could win any sign of emotion from her little daughter, either by love or by reproof; even Mr. Trelawney—though the child was lavish enough of caresses to him, and though a grave word from him could always bring the colour to her face—yet even he had thought that to move her to tears, or to any strong outward show of feeling, would require some more than ordinary cause; and yet here had come a stranger, who did not love her as these others did, who had never tried to understand her, to whom she was nothing but the chance companion of a few idle hours, and he could make the little heart quiver and break down with half a dozen careless words. It was a mystery—one of the small puzzles of life, which is so full of incomprehensible things. One of the small injustices of life, one may call it too, perhaps—the little bitter things that have to be borne because

they are irremediable, but that, to those who are the sufferers from them, though they are irremediable, never lose their sting.

## CHAPTER IV.

IT was not fairy stories that Frank used to tell to Dorcas. Frank's sympathies did not go much with fairies (he was neither young enough nor old enough at this period of his life to be interested in that quaint race of people); the tales with which *he* entertained her were narratives of school-boy life; stories of youthful prowess (a little coloured, possibly, by romance); descriptions of wonderful feats, where sometimes himself, sometimes another, was the hero; accounts of races and fights and perilous and hairbreadth escapes—all of which things, according to Frank, were matters of daily

and almost hourly occurrence in Eton life—"for it's the greatest school in all the world," he repeatedly told Dorcas, listening with eager and reverential ears, "and all the best men in the country have been brought up there. That's what my father says, so you needn't think it's only me," Frank would declare, finishing his praises sometimes rather as if he were refuting an opponent than merely instructing a credulous little disciple, who almost would have taken his bare word for it if he had assured her that at that celebrated seat of education the sun always shone at midnight, and the boys pursued their studies with golden crowns upon their heads.

She was never tired of listening to Frank when he told her about the wonders of his school; but, indeed, was she ever tired of listening to Frank, let him tell her what he would? With an implicit and unreasonable

faith and admiration she hung on his words, and would have done battle (had there been anyone to do battle with) for the literal truth of every one of them. He made her acquainted with a wonderful new world, and, as he talked, what had she to do but listen and believe? *She*, too, came soon to find his tales more exciting and entrancing than any fairy stories, for had they not the double charm of novelty and truth? and the still greater charm of being told by one who had taken part in all of them? Was she not a small Desdemona listening to Othello?

I am afraid she used to weary her father not a little by retailing to him what she considered the choicest of Frank's narratives. Her powers of description were not great at this time, and when I add to distaste of the subject generally on Mr. Trelawney's part the tedium occasioned by having to listen to a

story not interesting in itself, confusedly and feebly told, with many repetitions, and with not unfrequently the point left out, it is easy to imagine that the hours which Dorcas spent in trying to kindle in her father's breast the same flame of enthusiasm that was burning in her own, had not altogether the result she wished to produce. I fear, do what she would, the fire would not light in Mr. Trelawney's bosom. In vain she discoursed, and told him of Frank's heroic deeds, and appealed to him for sympathy; his answers, I grieve to say, were far more often a laugh, or some cynical and doubtful inquiry, than any expression of the admiration that glowed in poor little Dorcas's own face and voice.

But childhood is a credulous and unsuspecting age, and, though Mr. Trelawney was unsympathetic, the little girl, brimful of her own sympathy, was a good while in finding

it out. From day to day, in quiet faith and self-absorption, did she continue to season her discourse with Frank Harcourt's name, and never guessed that it was a name which had become discordant in her father's ears. She was so full of delight in him that she could not conceive the fact of another person finding no delight in him at all.

“Don't you like Frank, papa?” she said to her father at last one day in wonder, startled by some very plain sentence on his part, and the great amazed brown eyes looked up to him with almost a blank bewilderment. “Don't you *like* Frank?” she said.

But even then some jesting answer (for perhaps Mr. Trelawney in his heart knew that he was unjust to the lad, and was ashamed of the feeling that made him so

antagonistic to him) silenced and satisfied her.

“Don’t I like him? Well, I have never tasted him yet, Dorthy. I daresay he would make a very good fricassee,” he said; and then, of course, Dorcas laughed, and began to chatter again on her usual subject.

Perhaps to Frank himself the knowledge came more quickly than it did to her that he was no favourite with Mr. Trelawney. One feels these things by instinct, and probably the boy knew, without putting it into words, almost from the first, that it was the feminine portion of the family that regarded him with favour, and not the master of the house. For his own part, he was shy with Mr. Trelawney, and did not care for his society much. When Dorcas would propose—as she did occasionally at the beginning of their acquaintance—that he and

her father should accompany her together on some ramble or some expedition, he would invariably withdraw himself from the proposed entertainment. He would have gone if Letty had been suggested for the third one of the party, for he and Letty had drawn greatly to one another, but to form a third with Mr. Trelawney—that was a prospect at which Frank instinctively shied. He would not go with Dorcas on those terms; nor, indeed, were the terms such that Mr. Trelawney either would have been eager to accept them.

So Dorcas, during these weeks, when she walked with her father, continued to walk with him alone, and when Frank was with her Mr. Trelawney kept in his study—or, if he wanted exercise, took a solitary ramble. I am afraid that sometimes as he paced up and down his terrace-walk, whence, looking across the meadows, he could see the two

children playing together there, a feeling of unreasonable and bitter sadness used to creep over him, and take the light out of the day. He would hear their laughter sometimes, and as he heard it he would know that, if he had been wholly unselfish in his love, its sound should make him glad—and yet it did not make him glad. How could he give up to a stranger the creature who had been entirely his till now, and feel no pang? He used to walk up and down that familiar path of his, yearning for the patter of the little steps beside him again, for the feeling of the little hand within his hand.

I suppose if you had asked Dorcas during this time whether she still liked better to be with her father than with anyone else she would innocently have answered, as she had always answered, “Yes;” but, in truth, before she had known Frank for a week, she

no longer liked to be with her father best ; she liked best to be with Frank. She would have left her father's side to run to Frank ; she would have spent, if she could, the live-long day with him, and never have wearied, or longed for the sight of any other face.

“You *are* a funny little thing ; I wonder what you'll do when I'm gone ?” the young sultan said to her one day, with the charming *naïveté* that is possible at twelve years of age.

What should she do without him ? I suppose she had never begun to think of that yet. To Dorcas the happy days were so long ; each week a little lifetime ; a month hence—how could she look forward to a period so far away ?

“Oh, but you're not going yet,” she only said, in answer to the other's speech, and

went on with her occupation of stringing a daisy chain.

They used to spend hours in making daisy chains, this pair of foolish children; they would deck Dorcas out in necklaces—one round her neck, one round her waist, one round her hat, two round her wrists, and, bedizened in this fashion, she would come home to Letty, as proud of her daisies as if they had been chains of gold.

But yet, in truth, though Dorcas did not recognize it, this pleasant visit of Frank's was really passing fast away.

"Mamma's coming home next week, and we're to be up in town before she gets there," he suddenly informed Dorcas one June day. "I think we shall be going on Tuesday or Wednesday. It will be jolly. Only I wish you were coming too," he had the grace to add. "I don't care a

bit for Woodlands, or any of the people there; but I shall be sorry to say good-bye to you."

And then Dorcas looked in his face, with the first dawning comprehension breaking over her of the pain, perhaps almost of the possibility, of parting, and the little lips began to quiver.

"Oh, it will be dreadful!" she broke out, piteously; on which he laughed, and in his light, bright way began to say a few words that were meant perhaps to comfort, or perhaps only to tease her.

"You won't mind it, really. You'll forget all about me in the course of a week. Little things like you never remember anything," he said, and laughed again when he saw the tears coming up to her brown eyes. For of course in his heart he was pleased because she was sorry that he was going. He would have been considerably disap-

pointed if she had received the announcement of his departure with indifference. He liked her to be sorry, and to think that she should care for nothing after he was gone.

And, indeed, he himself was sorry. As the time for his going drew near, he spent more and more of his time at the Trelawneys'; he made his approaching departure an excuse for being with Dorcas almost all day long. "Do they not mind your coming here so much, Frank?" Letty would ask him sometimes, a little uneasily; but he only answered with a laugh—oh, no, they didn't mind; there was nobody that wanted him at Woodlands; if he was back in time for dinner he might go anywhere he liked; and so he would come over early—generally not more than an hour after breakfast was ended—and the two children would go out into the fields, and spend almost the whole day together, and he would share Dorcas's

early dinner, and only take his departure after Letty perhaps had warned him two or three times over that it was more than time for him to go.

“If this were not to end soon, I should say you had better make up the bed in the spare room, and ask Mr. Frank to be obliging enough to come to us for good,” Mr. Trelawney said one evening to his wife, with grim jesting.

The boy's incessant presence irritated him excessively, yet he was beginning to feel that he could afford to jest now. In a few more days would not his little daughter become his own again? He might have kept her his own perhaps all this time, he often thought, if he had used his authority at first to check her intimacy with Frank, and sometimes he reproached himself because he had not used it; but he was a man in whose character the passive element was

strong, who shrank from interference, who would rather bear an evil—even an evil from which he suffered keenly—than stir himself to remove it. His first impulse when Frank came for the second time to the house had been to send him about his business, but he had not acted on it ; during the last six weeks he had probably had many such impulses, but he had acted on none of them. Had he ordered Frank off it would have vexed the child, and he could not bear to vex her. That was how he reasoned. Moreover, the annoyance was only temporary ; a little while would end it ; and since he had not stopped the business at the beginning he would let it run its course now. But nevertheless, when Frank began to make a point of appearing at the garden-gate before the breakfast things were almost off the table, and of bestowing his company on Dorcas in one unbroken flow

till six o'clock in the evening, this lavish generosity tried Mr. Trelawney's temper sorely.

"You seem to have a considerable amount of spare time on your hands, my young friend," he said to the boy, brusquely, one day. "Is there no Latin or Greek to be got up all these weeks for your next term at Eton?"

And then the lad laughed, and blushed, and answered a little shamefacedly that he supposed there ought to be,—only nobody, he thought, expected him to work just now; he was going to have a tutor when they got up to town.

"The sooner you get up there, then, the better, I should say," Mr. Trelawney retorted; and Frank turned away with something of a frown on his fair brow.

"It's no business of his. I suppose, if my father doesn't find any fault, *he* needn't,"

he thought, half angrily, not recognizing at the moment that the real cause of Mr. Trelawney's remarks was by no means that over-anxiety as to his studies which appeared upon the surface, but something much more personal, if—from Frank's point of view—of less importance.

Perhaps, indeed—childlike and boylike—Frank never from the beginning to the end suspected why Mr. Trelawney showed so little kindness to him. He understood that he did not like him, but he never understood why he did not like him, nor guessed that his visible presence in the house was only a few degrees less offensive to the master of it than the consciousness of his presence in the fields, when Dorcas was his companion there.

“I don't know what poor Dorthy will do when you go away; she will miss you terribly,” Letty said to the lad on the morn-

ing of the last day he came to spend with them. She looked into his face with her kind blue eyes as she spoke; she put her hand on his shoulder with a gentle action that she often used to him. "And, my dear, *I* shall miss you too," she said. "I shall often wish that I could see you here again."

"You've been very good to me," the lad answered, quickly.

"And so she has—and I think she is good to everybody," he said a minute afterwards to Dorcas, with a flush upon his cheek. "She's not a bit like other people—I mean, you know," he said, a little confusedly, "not—not like other ladies; but *I* don't mind, I'm sure, for I think she's nicer than many a lady is. Nicer than Mrs. Warburton, *I* know, twenty times over."

And then he began to dwell on Mrs. Warburton's shortcomings in the qualities

that are needed to constitute “niceness;” and if there had been anything in his speech that Dorcas did not understand, it made so little impression on her that she forgot it at once as he went on talking.

They had petitioned, as it was Frank’s last day, that they might have their dinner out of doors, and so Letty had packed a basket with good things for them, and at a very early hour (for if the banquet and the guests are both ready, why should the eating of the feast be delayed?) they spread their table-cloth at the foot of a tree, and, in spite of their impending parting, had a merry meal. They made an imaginary table, and Dorcas sat at the top and Frank at the bottom of it, and Dorcas played the part of hostess, and carved pretended dishes of the richest kinds—turkeys, and venison, and game, and plum-puddings—all which dainties, under the outward form of sand-

wiches and seed-cake, were solemnly served to Frank, and eaten by him and Dorcas together with as keen a relish as if they had been actually partaking of the viands whose names they used.

“Isn’t it nice to have dinner this way?” Dorcas asked midway in the meal, with almost a sigh of enjoyment. “I can’t think why people don’t do it oftener, and just make pretend whenever they want good things.”

“Oh, well, I don’t know that that would quite do, if you tried it on too often,” Frank, with a wider experience of life than Dorcas’s, answered dubiously. “You see, it’s fun to call things out of their names once in a way, but you would pretty soon get tired of pretending that bread and butter was roast partridge, and milk was champagne, if you *really* wanted a good dinner, I fancy.”

“But *I* should like bread and milk, however hungry I was,” said Dorcas, simply.

“Yes, I daresay *you* would, but everybody is not like you. Think of giving my father bread and milk for dinner, and telling him to make pretend he was eating venison !”

And then even Dorcas laughed, and Frank gravely handed over his plate for a little more of the roast turkey.

Was it possible that these two should never sit together any more under the sweet shady trees?—that their play-time was over—their last day come—and that there was for them no to-morrow? Sometimes, with wistful eyes, Dorcas looked in her companion’s face, but she could not realize the coming sorrow. What had the little heart ever known yet of parting or of loss?

“I suppose I shall come back some time.

Oh, yes—I shall be sure to come back again—some time or other,” Frank said, speaking lightly, according to his wont, and laughing at Dorcas’s solemn glances.

Yet even Frank found his spirits fail a little as the day went on, and once he even said he wished he wasn’t going away ; it was rather a bore, when the weather was so fine, and he was enjoying himself so.

“ But then it’s awfully jolly in London too,” he added next moment. “ I shan’t want to be back when I once get there. Wouldn’t *you* like London too, if you could see it ! Wouldn’t you like to see the Horse Guards, and to go to the theatre ? ”

“ Yes—I suppose I should,” answered Dorcas, to whose imagination, however, these delights made as yet no very deep appeal. “ I daresay it must all be very nice. And I’d like to go to Eton too,” she added.

But to this Frank, whose feeling for the proprieties was naturally outraged by such a proposition, hurriedly demurred.

“Oh, that’s stuff! You couldn’t go there,” he said. “Just fancy *you* going to Eton, and trying to learn what *we* do! Wouldn’t you find yourself floored!”

“But I only meant I’d like to see it,” said Dorcas, humbly.

“Oh, that’s another thing.” And Frank let himself be mollified. “Yes, *I’d* like you to see it too. I say—you must come some day. Don’t you think you will? You’re sure to come to London some time or other; everybody does, you know.”

But Dorcas could not stretch her imagination forward to that uncertain period. To her London was a place that was very, very far away; as far as distance went, she did not know much difference between it and the North Pole. She made no answer to

Frank's hopeful prophecies ; they were too vague for her little mind to accept them, or to derive comfort from them.

They took off their shoes and stockings presently and paddled in the river, and that pleasant exercise soon brought back Dorcas's laughter. At six years old grief is a very moveable burden : if it mounts upon our shoulders often, it slips from them again with a lightness and rapidity quite amazing. It was dreadful to think of saying good-bye to Frank ; yet, with the clear bright water rippling over her feet, with the wind blowing her hair into her eyes, and with Frank beside her, talking nonsense, how could Dorcas be anything but merry ?

They sat down on the grass when they were tired of paddling, and played at cat's cradle for the better part of a livelong hour ; then they made paper boats and floated them, and watched till their frail

craft got wrecked. And after that they went to where a large fallen tree was lying, and played at rocking-horses on the branches of it. This was the most delightful amusement of all, and lasted them till their day came to an end.

It had been but a few weeks since the children had first played together in these pleasant meadows : it had been May when they first met, and it was scarcely Midsummer yet ; but what a long, long time it seemed to both of them ! To Dorcas, all things already dated from that day on which she had first seen Frank : that first coming of his appeared to her already like something that had happened years ago.

“I say, we must be going back !” Frank suddenly exclaimed at last, as they were still riding their imaginary steeds. “It is a quarter to six already.” And he jumped down to the ground.

"Oh, I didn't think it was nearly that!" moaned Dorcas, sadly, and came down too, with less alacrity.

She knew they must go home, so it was no use rebelling. She gave a longing look behind her, and then began resignedly to trot along by Frank's side.

"You *are* in an awful mess!" said Frank to her, not very courteously, regarding her, after a moment or two, with eyes that did not betoken admiration. "How you must have been rubbing yourself on that tree! Why, all your frock is as green as grass! I hope *I'm* not like that," said the lad, and began to take a hurried review of his own garments.

"Oh, it's just the green stuff come off. These nasty frocks get dirtied with anything," said Dorcas, in a tone of hopeless endurance. "I wish I hadn't to wear frocks. They're always dirtying, or tearing,

or getting wetted. It's so much nicer to be a boy."

"Of course it is," returned Frank, accepting the compliment with perfect readiness; "but then everybody can't be boys, so you must make the best of it. You *are* in a pretty pickle, though, I must say! You've got a tear at the other side as long as my arm."

"Oh, dear!" cried Dorcas.

"Why, your mother will think we've been fighting!"

"But we'll tell her we haven't. You see, there were so many things to catch one on the tree."

"You should have looked out, then, and they wouldn't have caught you. They didn't catch me."

"Yes—but then——"

"Oh, yes—I'm older, of course, and I know how to manage, and I'm a boy,"

interrupted Frank, cataloguing his various advantages with great gusto; "that's all true enough. But then even girls ought to know how to ride on trees without making Judys of themselves," said Frank, throwing a tone of scorn into the opprobrious epithet that, I am afraid, sent a pang through the little maid's heart.

She walked on rather despondently, without replying to him, only trying impotently after a few moments to smooth down her tumbled frock. Its stained and torn disorder had troubled her little at the first, but now a vague sense of distress stole over her at the thought that she was a disreputable object in Frank's eyes.

"I can take it off as soon as I get home. Mamma will give me another one—and she won't mind," she said, deprecatingly, after a little while.

"Well, I hope she *will* give you another

one ; she'll need to," Frank retorted, with a laugh. But after that he generously refrained from harping any longer on a subject so naturally painful to Dorcas's feelings. " Any way, torn frocks or not, we've had a jolly time of it," he said, heartily, instead ; and at this the little face brightened again, and Dorcas forgot her troubles in the happy thought that Frank had been content.

" Let's have a race," he said, presently ; and hand in hand the two children ran, and in a few minutes reached the garden-gate breathless. Letty was waiting for them there ; it was more than time already that Frank should be on his way home.

They had to explain and apologize for Dorcas's condition ; then Frank was hurried to the study to take his leave of Mr. Tre-lawney—a business of which he made short work.

" We're going away to-morrow, sir, and

Mrs. Trelawney said I might come and say good-bye to you," he merely announced, as he stood at the opened door; and then he advanced a step or two into the room, and Mr. Trelawney rose up and advanced too, and surveyed the boy with eyes that did not betoken regret.

"Ah! you're going back to London? So I hear. Well, if you have as good a faculty for working as you have for—idling, you ought to get on, my lad. I hope you will. You have my best wishes. And so good-bye to you."

And then he shook Frank's hand—cordially, as he could afford to do now.

"Good-bye, sir," Frank answered, a little offended, and made his retreat with a touch of colour in his face.

"He's always going on about my being idle! As if boys were to live like him, and never have holidays!" he thought, with

natural indignation, as he ran back to re-join the other two.

But the sight of their kind and tender faces healed the momentary irritation. The boy was soft-hearted in his way—not soft-hearted always, perhaps, but at least at moments. These two had been kind to him, and had made him happy, and he held Letty's hand very tight when the end came, and could hardly make his little parting speech to her.

“I hope we shall see you some time again, my dear. It's been very nice—very nice to have you here,” Letty said, and patted and stroked his arm, with the tears in her eyes.

“It's been nice for *me*, I know,” the boy answered, huskily. “I think it's been just the jolliest time——”

And then he could not say any more, but suddenly turned to Dorcas, and lifted her

up in his arms and kissed her, and then ran away. Twenty yards from the gate he turned back to wave his cap to them, and call out again—"Good-bye!"

They were still standing at the gate then, and they stood looking after him till he was out of sight, Letty holding her little daughter's hand in hers. Dorcas had never said a word, and the brown eyes were quite dry, but Letty noticed how tightly the child's fingers clung to her, and held her, even till they had got back to the house.

"We must come and get your frock changed now, Dorcas," she said, when they returned indoors, and Dorcas merely answered, "Yes," and went upstairs without speaking again.

She was very quiet for the rest of the evening. She went and sat in her customary place in her father's room, and played there silently with her doll. Her father came to

her once or twice, and talked to her for a little, but she did not care much to answer him.

At eight o'clock Letty put her to bed, and an hour afterwards, coming back to look at her, found her still wide awake.

"Why, Dorthy, I thought you were so tired. I thought you would go to sleep at once," she said to her.

She sat down by the side of the little crib, and after a few moments she asked Dorcas if she was lying awake because she was sorry about Frank; but the child only turned round in her bed at that question and hid her face with her arms, and made no reply.

There was some strange instinct in Dorcas often that hardened her to her mother,—that made her always, or almost always, if she was feeling strongly, seal up her heart from her. Even now, though Letty loved

Frank, she would not speak to her about him: she would rather bear her pain in silence and without sympathy. For a few moments Letty tried to win her from her reserve; then, with one of the pangs that she felt so often, she turned away again and left her. She smoothed the tumbled bed-clothes and beat up the little pillow,—poor services, of the only sort that Dorcas almost ever took willingly from her,—and then went quietly away.

“I suppose it’s my fault,” she sadly said. “Anybody who knew how to manage her would get her to open her little heart; but I can’t; I’m no good to her.” And she sorrowfully went back to her sewing that she had left, with that sense of failure, which rarely altogether left her, sharpened for the moment into a bitterer pain.

## CHAPTER V.

MR. TRELAWNEY had got rid of the thorn in his side, and Dorcas had lost her playfellow, and once more the old life began again, and the summer days went on as they had been used to do before Frank's revolutionary advent. For a little while the child remained dull and quiet; her former games had lost their zest for her; she pined for the companionship that had been hers for those brief weeks,—for the pleasures she had tasted, whose flavour had spoilt her for the food that had satisfied her before.

But gradually the present came once

more to absorb the past, and by fine degrees Dorcas grew—not, probably, to forget Frank, but to cease to think of him every hour: the fairy tales regained their charm, the long rambles with her father recovered their delight, and to all outward appearance, when six months had passed, that sudden eruption of Frank Harcourt's had become as an event that had passed away, and left no trace behind it. Not often six months after his departure did anyone speak his name, nor even Dorcas give any sign that she still thought of him.

“I suppose a child's heart is really about as unimpressionable as water,” Mr. Trelawney sometimes thought to himself, as he watched her with speculating eyes.

It would be the same if he himself were removed from her, he used to think: she would forget all about him in a few weeks, and be contented with the first substitute

that fell in her way. He told himself this with a sort of bitterness; but, nevertheless, even though he suspected that his own fate in similar circumstances might be the same as Frank's, it gave him a sense of very unquestionable satisfaction to see how rapidly, to all appearance, Frank was forgotten, and with what coolness the little damsel settled down again into her old contentment.

“Dorcas is a very happy little girl, I think—is she not?” he said to her one day, when the leaves had fallen again, and the winter fires were alight; and she looked up into his face and answered—“Yes,” without a shadow of reserve in her bright eyes.

So the disturbance caused by those few weeks while Frank had reigned paramount passed quietly away, and left no ill effects behind it. Or, rather, left no effects at all

behind it—at least, that Mr. Trelawney's eyes could see.

Perhaps she had really forgotten him ; perhaps she had merely locked up the recollection of him in some secret chamber of her heart, of which she only opened the door when no one saw her. A child's nature is so strange a thing. She had been full of talk about him all the time that he was with her, carrying his name so perpetually on her lips that other people grew tired of hearing it ; but from the first day after his departure she scarcely any longer talked of him at all ; even when she seemed to miss him most she held her peace about him.

“Dorty, you never speak about Frank now ?” Letty said to her once, after a few weeks had passed, wondering if the recollection of her play-fellow had really gone out of the child's mind ; but Dorcas made

no answer to her. She was playing with a black kitten with which she and Frank had often played together, and perhaps, absorbed in her game, she did not notice her mother's speech.

So time went on, and the waters seemed to have closed over Frank's name, and Dorcas—a happy but sedate little maiden—fell back into all the old ways that his visit had interrupted and broken up. Once more she became her father's companion, and the pride and gladness of her father's life. The months passed on after Frank's departure, and the years passed on, and he never came again.

Such placid years!—in which winter and seed-time and summer and harvest succeeded one another in a quiet and contented round—happy, and busy, and uneventful. The hair began to silver as

they passed on Mr. Trelawney's temples, and Letty lost her youth, and Dorcas slipped imperceptibly out of childhood, and shot into a tall, slim girl, with a bright and pretty face, Quaker-like still in a certain quiet and demure expression, yet with light and laughter too behind the lashes of her sweet brown eyes. "She is very like my mother," Mr. Trelawney often said, and yet he said it always dubiously, for the girl was like her grandmother, but yet it was likeness with a difference: the delicate features came from Mrs. Trelawney, but the character of the face—a certain modest, and yet frank and fearless brightness that it had—she had inherited from some other progenitor—not from Mrs. Trelawney, nor from her father, nor from Letty. With intense tenderness her father would often look into her eyes—not really reading much in them, perhaps (girls' eyes reveal so little), but

with passionate love and faith *believing* that he read a whole little world of hidden things.

Between him and Dorcas no separating sword ever again came to part them for so much as a day after that evening—blest in Mr. Trelawney's memory—when Frank bade her good-bye, and hurried for the last time along the road to Woodlands. He had his daughter to himself from that time (as he had had before Frank came), and their companionship was one long and unbroken happiness to them both.

Was there anything a daughter could be to a father that Dorcas was not? Between them there seemed to be a natural sympathy, deep as their two lives. They spent their days together, and neither of them seemed to need any other companionship.

“Do you think Dorcas should go to

school?" Letty asked her husband, doubtfully once, and his instant and almost contemptuous, "No, certainly not!" silenced such inquiry for ever after.

"Go to school? No—why in the world should she do that?" he exclaimed. "You can teach her to sew, if she needs to be taught that, and you may leave all the rest to me. I would not send her to school on any consideration whatever."

"But I thought that for music and drawing, and things like that—" Letty began, meekly.

"I see no necessity for her learning music and drawing. Her time will be far better spent in learning Latin and Greek."

"Do you think that?—for a girl?" Letty ventured to object; and then her husband gave a little lecture to her.

For either boy or girl the study of the

ancient literature was the noblest study in the world, he told her. Such things as music and drawing—mere accomplishments as they were in a girl's ordinary education—could be learnt at any time; but if Dorcas was ever to become a real student she must study Greek and Latin from the beginning; she must make those two tongues the foundation on which she built everything else.

“I was only afraid it might be too difficult,” Letty gently said to this, yielding up her own will—as she always did yield it—to her husband, but doing it perhaps in this instance with a little inward sigh. “Girls are so different from boys; you see you hardly ever make scholars of them—and I *should* have liked Dorcas to be able to sing and play nicely,” she added, in rather a wistful tone.

“Well, I would not prevent that, Letty,”

he answered, kindly. "When she is older let her learn, if you like, to play and sing. Only I would not have her begin now. For some years to come, at any rate, I should not like anything of that sort to interfere with her graver and more important work."

And then Letty said no more, and Dorcas was delivered over to her father.

He taught her Latin and Greek, and on the whole she took to these languages pretty kindly. She also, happily, became instructed in history, and geography, and in various other excellent things. It soon grew to be not only her father's daily occupation, but his delight, to teach her. He put almost all other work aside that he might devote himself to this; morning and evening she and her studies were his one most prominent thought.

Perhaps the girl had a little more teach-

ing than was quite good or wholesome for her, yet on the whole she throve upon it, and she enjoyed it too. She was quick in apprehending, and she grew gradually—to some extent, at any rate—to love these studies that were so dear to her father's heart: for his sake probably in the first place, yet also perhaps a little for themselves. She could enjoy Homer when he read it to her in his musical voice, and could even catch something from him of his own enthusiasm. She was ambitious in at least some degree, and he did his best to quicken her ambition; she was perhaps too, in her heart, a little vain.

At twelve or fourteen it is rather flattering to be looked on in the light of a prodigy of learning, even when the eyes that so regard you are very ignorant ones; and I am afraid that, when she was about that age, Dorcas occasionally aired her acquire-

ments rather unnecessarily before certain persons who were less well-informed than herself,—till, happily, she was one day overheard at this exercise by her father, and suffered in consequence such shame and humiliation that she broke off the habit at once and for ever, and even for days afterwards repented of it (metaphorically) in sackcloth and ashes.

“My daughter, if you go on learning all your life, do you think what you know will ever be anything to be vain of?” Mr. Trelawney said to her, gently. “When you are tempted next to think anything of yourself, remember the humility of that great man who, after all his labours and his discoveries, compared himself to nothing greater than a little child gathering pebbles on the sea-shore.”

And then Dorcas hung her head, and was

so humbled that for hours she could scarcely look again in her father's face.

But the humiliation, though severe, was salutary, and the rank weed of vanity, if not torn up by the roots (which it is hard work ever to get done), was at any rate broken off so close to the ground that it showed itself above the earth no longer. Henceforward poor little Dorcas valiantly strove to close her ears to flatteries, and, as she grew older and wiser, she grew too to love her work more than the praise that came to her from it. Could any praise from outside lips be worth the pleasure of sitting by her father's side, and knowing, as they looked together over the same page, that every line of it was made the dearer to him because she understood it?

Gradually, as the years passed, she became more than a pupil to him : she became

a help in his work. He could trust the careful fingers to make correct extracts for him, and the careful eyes to search for many a reference and note. The work she did was possibly dull for her sometimes, or at least it would have been, if her love for him had not made it dear to her; but that love beautified it all. She was proud of being useful to him with a sacred pride; she would not have let any other hand take one iota of her labour from her.

So these two lived in one another; and as for Letty——! Well, Letty had her own place, they thought,—but that was not in the inner circle of the heart of either of them. The gentle, loving, feeble woman had to live her life as she best could, doing the work that fell to her to do, but closing her lips for the most part over all her futile regrets and futile longings. It was hard perhaps at times; but then the world is

full of hard things, Letty always patiently thought, and if she had her troubles she had also so much besides to make her glad. If indeed Mr. Trelawney and Dorcas could have loved her a little better——! But then they were so different from her : they were gentlefolks, and she was only a poor woman, and so it would not have been natural, she supposed. She was glad, with pure, unselfish love, that Dorcas was such a little lady ; she never for a moment wished that it had been otherwise, or grudged her husband one grain of his delight and satisfaction in the child.

“She might have been like me or one of my people,” she only thought, with earnest gratitude that it had not been so, “and then he would never have really cared for her ; but now, thank God ! he’ll never need to be ashamed of her by the side of any lady in the land.”

And she would look, with eyes made tender with love and thankfulness, at the little maiden, whose delicate and dainty prettiness was so far removed from anything that the unkindest lips could have called vulgar or unrefined, and (in spite of the sword in her own heart) feel proud that it should be so.

“Yes—she don’t take after you, Letty, or any one of the lot of us,” Mrs. Markham sometimes emphatically said.

Mrs. Markham had long ago taken another situation as housekeeper in a distant county, and, though she was growing old, was still buxom and healthy. Every year or two she would come to see Letty, and stay with her for two or three days, and during these visits Mr. Trelawney would treat her with great kindness, and Letty would always have much to say to her that she could say to no one else. But yet, though the pleas-

ure of seeing her aunt was great, as time went on Letty, perhaps inevitably, used to grow less and less eager for her coming, for Dorcas, as she got older, would gaze at her with curious and suspicious eyes, and would ask questions that were difficult to answer; such questions as—why did she not look like other ladies?—and what made her speak bad grammar, like Elizabeth in the kitchen?

“For she does speak bad grammar, mamma—you know she does,” she would say, persistently. “Why does she not talk as other people do? Did she never go to school and learn when she was a little girl?”

“I daresay she went to school, Dorcas,” Letty answered to this shrewd inquiry once, “but”—and then, with instinctive cowardice, she began to beg the question—“whether she ever did or not, you ought

to love her all the same, for she's one of the best and kindest women that ever came into the world."

"Well, I do like her," returned Dorcas, a little taken aback by this rebuff. "I think she's nice enough; only, you know, she *does* speak oddly; nobody can help seeing that," said the pert little damsel, who had all Lindley Murray's rules at her fingers' ends.

"There are better things than speaking good grammar, Dorcas. You try to grow up to be as good as Aunt Markham, and then the way you talk won't matter much," Letty answered to this last speech,—rather unadvisedly; for Dorcas made no reply to it, indeed, but she went away smiling rather scornfully to herself.

"The way one talks won't much matter! What things mamma does say!" she thought. "She might just as well declare that being

a lady at all did not matter!" And this idea seemed to her so supremely ridiculous that, in her amusement, perhaps for the moment she forgot that other question which she had asked about Mrs. Markham, and to which her mother had made no response.

The last time that Dorcas had seen Mrs. Markham was when she was about fourteen years old, and for nearly three years after this Mrs. Markham happened to pay no other visit to Shepton; but when the girl was seventeen she at length came again, and the six or eight days that she stayed with Letty then amply sufficed, I fear, for the shrewd, observant eyes to find out a good deal to which poor Letty, in her tender cowardice, would gladly have kept them blind.

Till now Dorcas had lived on the whole a secluded life, but yet, though she had

had few companions, there had always been certain houses in Shepton that had been open to her, so that she had been by no means altogether without friends. They had, for instance, been kind to her at the vicarage ; Dr. and Mrs. Gibson too had often asked her to visit them, and perhaps some half dozen other families amongst her father's old acquaintances had taken some notice of her—partly from old friendship's sake, partly from kindness to herself.

At the time of Mr. Trelawney's marriage the whole of Shepton, as you know, had agreed that he had perpetrated a piece of egregious folly, and they had punished him for it by declining to visit Letty, and so for a good while a number of houses that had been open to him once became closed to him, and people, who would formerly have greeted him with a cordial shake of the

hand, if they had met him and Letty in the street passed him now with a bow.

But Letty was so gentle, inoffensive, and humble that in time, unconsciously to herself, she had almost borne down the feeling that had risen against her. How could one long bear enmity to a creature so little aggressive, so quiet and kindly, so meek in her bearing of the honours that had been thrust upon her? Perhaps her own class was slow in ceasing to speak evil of her, but amongst her husband's former friends first one and then another began to take some little kindly notice of her—to greet her courteously when they met, to go a little out of their way to speak to her; and then a few late calls began to come, with apologies that they had been so long delayed; and, finally, after Dorcas's birth, the tide for a time altogether turned, and a score

of trifling kindnesses were shown to Letty, which she received with a half wonder and half gratitude.

“But people are always interested, I suppose, in babies,” she said, soon giving all the credit to Dorcas of having awakened this unlooked-for feeling of sympathy.

It was after Dorcas was born that invitations to a few houses that had given no invitations to her before began to come to Letty; but her natural timidity and shrinking from society had increased upon her by this time, and Mr. Trelawney could not prevail upon her to accept them. She had gone to the vicarage once in simple childish pride and expectation of enjoyment, but that feeling could never come back again. It was not that she resented the neglect that had been shown her—she was far too humble to resent it; only she understood some things now that she had not under-

stood at first. These people were kind to ask her to visit them—yes, and she was grateful to them, but she would not trouble them by accepting their invitations, and she would not pain her husband by giving him cause any more to be ashamed of her. Would he please say she was busy with her baby, and not very strong, and then—go to their houses himself and not mind her? She entreated him till he did it.

“I do not want to go any more than you do, Letty,” he persisted in saying for a time; but she begged him so earnestly to go that at last he could not refuse her.

“You see, they have asked me—they have done all that is nice and kind, and so now you can do just as you used to do,” she pleaded; and so at last he yielded and went, and the renewed acquaintances had continued for the most part from that time till now, Letty being still occasionally called

upon, and still, as a matter of form, included in some invitations, though it had come to be quite comfortably understood that she never accepted any, but took refuge always in that convenient excuse of want of health, which was half true and half false, but which fitted in with the desires both of herself and of her would-be hosts too well for it to be to the interest of anyone to dispute it.

So Letty did not trouble Shepton society with her presence, and—society being grateful to her—was, perhaps, the more kindly treated by it on that account; and as for Mr. Trelawney and Dorcas, they mixed a little in it, in a very moderate way, and Dorcas had her friends and favourites, and indeed, on the whole, was, perhaps, made a good deal of—because people were so sorry for her, they said, and because it was such a terrible disadvantage to a girl

to have a mother like Letty. "Of course nobody would ever be so cruel as to say a word to her, but she is sure to hear the truth sooner or later, poor dear," they often said ; and in truth their tenderness over her brought the story of her father's marriage at times so curiously near their lips that, if Dorcas did not guess it, it was almost more her fault than theirs.

But yet, up to this time, she had not guessed it, and, happy in her ignorance, and in her unconsciousness that there was anything in her history that was kept a secret from her, she went her way without suspicion, and took her place in the little world amidst which she lived, frankly and fearlessly ; until, when she had a little while passed her seventeenth birthday, there came this visit of Mrs. Markham's, which set her pondering about various things of which she had scarcely thought before.

It had puzzled her a little three years ago that her aunt should talk so oddly, and look so little like other ladies, but in the time which had elapsed since then, not being on the whole much interested in the matter, she had half forgotten that she had been so puzzled. "Aunt Markham is such a funny old woman, I think," she merely now said lightly to her mother, one night before her visit began. "Oh yes, I know she is very nice—but she *does* say comical things—doesn't she? I remember I used to think so; only then, to be sure, that was long ago," said Dorcas, quickly, smiling a little in the dignity of her seventeen years at what she could believe now might have been the crude judgment of fourteen.

But, unhappily, when Mrs. Markham came, that judgment of three years ago was not reversed, but, on the contrary,

fixed and confirmed immoveably in the sharp young critic's mind.

The good woman had grown stout and heavy in these latter days, and the first sight that Dorcas had of her, descending—not gracefully—from the fly that had conveyed her from the station, with her face a good deal reddened by her journey, and a plaid shawl of strong colours wrapped comfortably about her ample figure, was not calculated to impress the girl with much admiration for her outward bearing. “She looks like an old cook,” she thought in amazement to herself, as she stood on the doorstep, not eager at all for the embrace which she knew in a few moments would be given to her.

Her father, with careful courtesy, was handing Mrs. Markham from the carriage, and the first words Dorcas heard her utter were spoken to him.

“Oh, now, don’t you trouble, sir. I must just take my time, you see, for I’ve got weightier since I was here last,” she said, and slowly began to descend, while Mr. Trelawney supported her on one side, and Letty on the other. “There now—I’m a deal of bother to you—but I have had the rheumatics in my left knee this last six months, and it’s terrible how lame it makes me.”

And then she had reached the ground, and took Letty in her arms. “Ah, my darling, but I’m glad to see you!” she said, with a long, resounding kiss. “And the child too. Lord ha’ mercy, how she’s grown!”

Dorcas was half ashamed of herself, but she flushed as her time came too to be greeted, and did not like it. She escaped from her grand-aunt’s embrace as quickly as she could; she was glad when they all got inside the

house, and Letty took possession of Mrs. Markham, and carried her upstairs.

She gave a half shy glance at her father when he and she were left alone. Could she venture to say what was in her mind? He treated Mrs. Markham with such grave but evident respect that she was not quite sure, but yet she longed to speak.

“Papa, is she not rather a dreadful old woman?” she asked him, in a sudden whisper, with a face half solemn, half prepared for laughter.

But to her vexation he checked her with a grave rebuke.

“You are too fond of condemning people who don’t quite fit your fancy, Dorcas,” he said to her. “No, she is not a dreadful woman. You must not say that. You must try to like her, and to speak with respect of her too—both for your mother’s sake and mine.”

And then he passed on to his study, and left Dorcas alone, partly puzzled, partly hurt, feeling a little as if she had been hardly used, and scolded when she had scarcely been in fault.

How could she help being surprised at Mrs. Markham, when Mrs. Markham was so unlike an ordinary lady? "I am sure she can never have been brought up like other people," Dorcas said to herself defiantly. "I mean, she can't have been in the position of a lady always; but, if she has not, why can't papa and mamma say so, and not make a mystery about her?" And Dorcas went her way aggrieved, and did not, I am afraid, for that first day, at any rate, try much to carry out her father's request.

In truth, at this period of her life, the girl in her heart was a rabid little aristocrat, and whatever was unrefined or common, even though it might be so only in outward

appearance, found little favour or charity in her sight. To a large extent it was because he was so perfect a gentleman that she was so proud of her father, and, if her mother had been as perfect a lady, she would have loved her better than she did, I am afraid, by a good deal. As it was, somehow she knew instinctively that Letty was not like her father. She knew it—she seemed always to have known it: vaguely, as far as any comprehension went of wherein lay the difference between them, but very certainly and clearly indeed as to the difference itself. The one was ignorant, while the other knew almost everything (or so, at least, Dorcas thought); the one had the quiet ease of manner that made him master of himself in almost any society; the other was always ill at ease with strangers, and least felicitous when felicity was most required.

But yet to her mother's shortcomings Dorcas had been so long accustomed that she had come—as was only natural—to accept them simply as matters of course, without wonder or question, or only—when they were brought prominently before her—with a little occasional annoyance. They were not aggressive faults (poor Letty's failings all her life had been so much more of the negative than the positive kind): she might be a little different from other people, but she was not startling, and—and vulgar, as surely Mrs. Markham was? All this first day, and indeed for more days than this one, the girl kept her puzzled eyes on her grand-aunt, and speculated and was disturbed about her.

She could not make up her mind to like her, that was the honest truth of it. She was a dainty little lady, and she was ashamed to think that this red-faced wo-

man, who called her father "sir," and spoke bad grammar, and could not be kept from making the beds and mending everybody's stockings, was her mother's aunt. She was afraid lest people should come to her house and see her. The vicar's wife came to call one day, and Dorcas flushed as she perceived her walking up the garden path.

"There is Mrs. Penrose!" she exclaimed, uneasily, and she was conscious of an unmistakable feeling of relief when, at this announcement, Mrs. Markham said, "Then I'll go upstairs, my dear," and promptly gathered up her work and went.

She was relieved undoubtedly for the moment; but yet afterwards, when the call was over, how could she help feeling that it was a strange thing that she should have gone?

"You have Mrs. Markham staying with you just now, have you not? I think I saw her

at church on Sunday," Mrs. Penrose said to Letty, as she sat talking; and then she made some civil inquiries about her health; but Letty never proposed to call her aunt to come down and see the vicar's wife.

"Does Aunt Markham not know Mrs. Penrose? That seems odd, when she has been here so often," Dorcas said, wondering, when their visitor had left the house.

I am afraid that during these days the girl made Letty's heart ache many a time, and filled her with fears that she knew were very cowardly. How could she still hope now, when Dorcas was almost a woman, to keep it any longer hidden from her that she and her people had been so far beneath her father's class? and yet she had not courage to tell the secret to her that she had tried so long to keep.

"I ought to do it, perhaps," she said to Mrs. Markham sadly one day—"I feel that

many a time ; but when I think that, if she knew it, she'd look down upon me (for she's hard at times—oh, I think we're all of us hard when we're very young !), I don't know how to do it. And yet I feel she'll find it out some day, and make it worse for me than if I told her now."

"Well, Letty, my dear, if I was you, I *would* tell her, and have done with it," Mrs. Markham replied to this speech. "You've got nothing to be ashamed of; and if you *was* a poor girl when Mr. Trelawney married you, you've tried your best to do your duty by him, and by the child too, and you've done it, and it hasn't been always easy either. You've nothing to be ashamed of, my dear, that I can see; and, for my part, I think better of Dorcas than to believe she'd ever cast it up to you, or bear a thought in her heart against you for it. She couldn't do that, Letty, and you her

own mother, though maybe she is a little bit stiff just now, and stuck-up with pride, as girls often are at her age. But she's a good girl in spite of that, and she couldn't be good and not be tender over you."

But, though Mrs. Markham spoke so, still Letty shook her head, and did not gain courage from the other's reasoning.

"I'd tell her with my own mouth, and never think twice about it, only then Letty would be vexed, so that would do no good," Mrs. Markham thought to herself, after she had finished speaking.

She had perhaps hitherto, since she came, been rather amused by the girl's little airs of superiority. Dorcas had treated Mrs. Markham with a great deal of civility, but it had been civility of a very frigid sort; she had talked to her formally, but she had entirely declined to become familiar with her; since Mrs. Markham entered the house

she had given her mother even less of her company than usual, and had made her abode, except at meal-times, almost wholly in her father's study.

"She does seem wonderfully fond of being with her papa. It's very nice for her, and for him too, but it's a bit dull for you, Letty," Mrs. Markham said once or twice, not without a feeling of rather tender pity.

She used for her own part to talk very frankly to Dorcas, and occasionally she would find fault with her, and would read a little lecture to her that rather surprised the girl, and did not perhaps overmuch please her.

"You might save your mother a bit of trouble, Dorcas, if you did"—this or that—"for her," she would tell her sometimes. "You're a little too fond, my dear, if you'll let me say it, of only doing the things you

like best; for, though I've not a word to say against your learning (the more you can learn the better), there's other things in the world besides books, and if you were to take your needle in your hand, and help your mother when she's busy for an hour or two a little oftener than you do, you'd be none the worse for it, and she'd be a good bit the better."

She would make little speeches of this sort, and sometimes Dorcas would be struck rather dumb at hearing them, and sometimes she would be a little indignant, and would try to defend herself. It seemed rather hard to the girl to be found fault with by this woman, whose vulgarity and want of education made her ashamed; and yet, though she was half angry, she was honest enough too to acknowledge sometimes that the homely words had a touch of truth in them.

For, though it had grown to be an accepted thing that she should spend nearly all her time with her father, yet did her mother's loneliness never awake a little pang of remorse in her heart?—had there not been days even before Mrs. Markham uttered her reproach when some momentary quickening of love for that gentle mother had made the girl feel that she and her father might both be kinder to her? She did not care for some of the things for which they cared: that was Dorcas's self-excuse; but was it necessary for three people to care for precisely the same things in order to be permitted to sit together?

“She used to sit many an hour with your father while he was at his work before you ever came into the world, my dear,” Mrs. Markham told her gravely, shaking her head, when Dorcas, half apologetically, one day murmured something about its being

dull for her mother to be in the study.

“I am afraid I am selfish,” the girl began penitently once or twice to think; “but, if I am, it is mamma herself who makes me so. She gives me everything—she claims nothing for herself; and I—I know I think too much of what is pleasantest, and so I forget her.”

But she did not make this confession except to herself; she could not quite bring herself to make it to Mrs. Markham, or to acknowledge her grand-aunt’s right to take her to task for her shortcomings.

“How *is* it that Aunt Markham is so uneducated, papa?” she frankly asked her father one day; but to her surprise he gave no direct answer to her question. He too, though he would hardly have acknowledged it, was sensitive about his wife’s low birth, and shrank with half-conscious cowardice from the thought of his daughter knowing

what her mother's position had been. He could not ignore the fact that it would tell against any educated man to say of him that he had married his servant. If his case had been peculiar (as no doubt it had been), still how could Dorcas be made to understand its peculiarity?—or how, even if explanations could have made it understood, would it be possible that to his own daughter he could condescend to make them?

Long ago he had seen that he must stand by the consequences of what he had done in silence, however he might be judged for it, and in fact the judgment of the world in general upon his marriage had a good while ago ceased much to trouble him: the people amongst whom he lived all knew the story of it, and had accepted it, and ceased to talk of it. But, as far as Dorcas was concerned, the case was different. Dorcas had

never heard yet that her mother had been a servant, and—though sometimes he almost wished that she knew it—poor Letty herself could scarcely have tried with more instinctive anxiety to keep the secret from her than he did.

So, when Dorcas said to him to-day, “How *is* it that Aunt Markham is so uneducated?” he attempted to turn aside her question, and would not give a plain answer to it.

“I am sure, my dear, I never asked her,” he merely said. And then he tried to divert the girl’s attention by making a remark upon some totally different subject; but her mind was full of the other matter, so she replied to his remark, and then defeated him by quietly resuming her inquiry.

“But surely you know something about it?—because, you see, she is so *very* unlike

other people. She *could* not have been born a lady. Was she?"

And then he could not but tell a morsel of the truth to her.

"No, I believe she was not," he said. "I don't know what her original position was, but her father and mother were—ahem!—probably tradespeople, or something of that sort."

"I think they must have been very *small* tradespeople then," replied Dorcas, quickly and shrewdly.

"Possibly. I never remember to have heard."

"And what was *Uncle* Markham?"

"That I cannot tell you either."

"Do you mean that you don't know?"

"I mean that if I ever knew I have forgotten."

"But was he a gentleman?"

"My dear, he was dead before I ever

saw your aunt. I don't know anything about him. Look here, Dorcas," he said, suddenly, "here is something I want you to do for me." And he took a paper from his desk, and began to give her directions about copying it. So she had to hold her tongue; but though she held her tongue she did not put the subject of her questions out of her mind.

"Aunt Markham, mamma lived with you, did she not, when she was a little girl?" she said a day or two afterwards, abruptly, to Mrs. Markham herself; and Mrs. Markham—knowing how much in the dark the girl had been kept—took a moment or two hurriedly to arrange her thoughts, and then—

"She lived with me before she married your father, my dear," she said. "She came and stopped with me after her own mother died."

“ Oh !—and was that in London ? ”

“ No ; here.” The word slipped from Mrs. Markham’s lips before she perceived that it would have been wiser to have omitted it.

“ Here in Shepton ? ” in a tone of great surprise.

“ Yes.”

Mrs. Markham gave her answer unwillingly, but with Dorcas sitting before her, looking with her keen eyes into her face, how could she help giving it ?

“ In Shepton ! Then you *lived* here ? ” cried Dorcas.

“ Yes, my dear, I lived here for a bit.”

“ And that was when papa fell in love with mamma ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And mamma was married from your house ? ”

“From—yes, yes—she was married while she was stopping with me.”

The reply was a little confused, but Dorcas, intent upon ascertaining the fact, did not perhaps notice the confusion.

“Oh! I never knew that. I had no idea you had ever lived here.”

“I daresay it never happened to be mentioned to you, my dear.”

“I always thought mamma had been married in London.”

“No; your mother left London a good bit before her marriage.”

“But she did live there once? Aunt Markham,”—suddenly—“what was grand-papa?”

“What was he?”—rather uneasily. “What do you mean, Dorcas?”

“I mean—had he a profession? Was he a doctor, or a clergyman, or what did he do?”

“He was—he was in business, my dear.”

(The answer was literally correct, yet Mrs. Markham was ashamed as she made it, remembering the tiny baker’s shop in the Borough, where Letty’s father had been used to sell loaves and flour.)

“Oh!” said Dorcas, a little dubiously, and she looked, for a moment or two, as if she was about to pursue the inquiry further; but, to Mrs. Markham’s great relief, after a little meditation, her questions took a fresh direction.

“And he died when mamma was young?”

“Yes, she was only a baby, poor dear.”

“And then—what did grandmamma do? Was she well off?”

“No, my dear, no. She’d a hard enough struggle for many years—till she died.”

“And then mamma was left alone? And then you came and were good to her?” The girl’s voice began to quicken. “And she would have had no home if she had not gone to you?”

“My dear, there was more than me that was kind to her. Perhaps *I* couldn’t have done much, if others hadn’t helped too.”

“But you took her to live with you? That was the greatest thing to do, was it not? Mamma always says that. She says you were like her own mother to her,” and the young eyes softened and brightened with a tender look that they did not always wear.

“I did the little that I could; but it was your father that did most, Dorcas.”

“Oh! but that was another kind of thing,” and Dorcas laughed. “Of course,

if somebody is in love with somebody else, he can't help being kind to her."

"But your father was kind to your mamma before he ever was in love with her, my dear. All that came afterwards."

"Then it was the being kind that made him fall in love, I suppose?"

"Perhaps it was. I don't know."

"Papa and mamma always talk so little about old times. It is odd that I never knew before that you lived in Shepton. What house did you live in, Aunt Markham?" asked Dorcas, placidly.

But this was too much for Mrs. Markham. She suddenly rose from her seat, on the pretext that her sewing was finished.

"Perhaps I'll show you some day, my dear," she said, with great outward self-

possession, but inward uneasiness, and, taking up her work-basket, she walked away, and left Dorcas alone, puzzled, but still far from guessing the truth.

“If she’s to go on asking questions like this, and me not be allowed to answer them, I’ll be glad when I get out of the house,” Mrs. Markham said to herself, feeling quite hot as she sat down in the safe refuge of her own room.

She stayed with Letty for eight days. It was a visit that had been long talked of, so she could not easily shorten it, and Dorcas, in spite of her girlish pride, got almost to like her before she went away.

“I wish she was not so dreadfully like an old cook, but yet she is a dear old thing with all her oddness, and, if she would really come and be housekeeper here, I think I should get quite fond of her,” she said, laughing, on the day on which Mrs. Mark-

ham took her leave. "Only still, you know, I do wish she was not one's aunt," she added, seriously; "and what I should do, if she ever were to ask me to go and stay with her, I do not know! It is rather funny, by-the-by, that she never *does* ask any of us to go and visit her; don't you think so, mamma? I should have imagined that she was exactly one of those hospitable old souls who would always like to have visitors to pet and be kind to."

"I—I suppose she is growing old, Dorcas. I daresay she has some good reason for not asking us," Letty answered, hastily, blushing as she spoke, and feeling ashamed of her own poor subterfuge.

And Dorcas noticed the embarrassed tone, perhaps, and laid it up in her memory amongst the many things connected with her aunt Markham that she did not understand.

## CHAPTER VI.

WE often try so hard and long to keep our secrets hidden, building barricades around them, telling or acting lies to guard them, setting a watch at the door behind which they stand concealed ; and then suddenly some accident on which we had never reckoned, some chance so unlikely that we had never feared it, makes, perhaps in one moment, all our efforts vain. For seventeen years poor Letty had kept her secret hidden from her daughter, and it happened all at once at the end of that time that a stranger told it to her in a dozen careless words.

The revelation was made one day soon

after Mrs. Markham's visit ended. It chanced that day that Dorcas, coming along the village street, was caught in a sudden summer shower; she had come out in the sunshine, not expecting rain, and, beginning to run to find some shelter, a woman standing at an open door asked her to come into her cottage.

"It's going to be a regular down-pour, miss," she said; "you'd best come in and stop till it's gone past."

She was an old woman—a Mrs. Cameron, whom Dorcas knew but slightly, but the rain was heavy, so she was glad to accept her invitation. She went into the cottage and sat down, and presently the old woman sat down too, and began to talk to her—about her rheumatism, and how the rain had been coming through the roof, and how times were so bad that she'd a deal of trouble to make both ends meet.

“And I’ve got my daughter here too, because she’s been sickly,” she went on, after a time; “she’s here with her baby; and her husband—he’s half his time out of work, and it’s a bad look-out for them. I was telling her yesterday that your mother might be willing to do something for her, and, if you’d mention it, miss, you’d be doing a kindness. If you’d just tell her it was Martha, as was fellow-servant with her at Mr. Trelawney’s before she married.”

She said this quite quietly, and the words passed into Dorcas’s ears, filling her mind with only a kind of vague confusion. As she heard them first, they did not even so much as startle her; she merely thought, a little puzzled, that surely the old woman had expressed herself oddly, or that she herself was stupid not to be able to understand her.

“As was fellow-servant with her at Mr.

Trelawney's before she married," she repeated slowly to herself, making an instinctive but vain effort to take the meaning of the statement in.

"Yes—that is a many years ago, miss, and times is changed since then," the old woman went on, wearily. "Martha didn't stop after your mother was married—she give warning to Mrs. Markham the very day she heard about the wedding; but they all parted good enough friends—and I think it wouldn't be more than my daughter might look for if Mrs. Trelawney was to give a little help to her now—for Martha never grudged her her good luck, I'm sure—and there's many in her place would have done it, and have made mischief—there's not a bit of doubt about that. But Martha—she wasn't that sort, miss."

Was the old woman in her senses? Dorcas rose from her seat trembling, with

the colour going and coming in her face.

“I don’t understand—I don’t know what you are saying,” she exclaimed, helplessly.

She glanced at the open door; could she not get out of this place into the fresh air again? But the old woman still went on talking in the same unmoved, monotonous way.

“You can’t go yet, miss; it’s raining harder than ever,” she said. “Them summer rains come down like floods. There’s Martha and the child out too—but they’ll get shelter somewhere, I suppose. You don’t remember Martha, miss?—but she’s seen you many a time when you was little. She went housemaid up to Mrs. Wilson’s after your mother was married, and she was there a good long bit, and Letty (that’s your mother; we used to call her Letty, you know) she’d come here now and then to ask after her, and to leave me a half

pound of tea, or a bit of bacon ; but prosperity's a bad thing for the memory, miss—that's what I've found ; and since Martha's been married, and gone away, its little we've seen of Mrs. Trelawney. But you'll maybe just tell her what I say—that Martha's husband's out of work, and perhaps she'll be able to spare a trifle for her."

"I—I think I had better go home. It is not raining so very much. I will tell mamma about your daughter," Dorcas said, hurriedly, in a strange nervous voice. She was trembling as she spoke ; she felt as if she could bear her position no longer ; there were a hundred questions on her lips, but they would have choked her if she had tried to ask them of this woman.

Without paying any regard to Mrs. Cameron's efforts to detain her she bade her good morning, and went out into the

street again, and ran homewards through the rain that was still falling fast. She hurried through the village, and only paused to take breath when the last house was left behind her. Wet as it was, she struck into a path across the fields, where it was least likely that, in such weather, she should meet any passer by, for a miserable instinct of shrinking from the sight of any face she knew had already taken possession of her.

Her mind was all in confusion as yet: she had made no connected story so far out of the facts that had been told her; gaunt and separate, they only stood up like isolated spectres before her, filling her with terror and shame. For this girl, you see, was but seventeen, and at that age the humbling of our pride seems such a bitter thing. Was it possible—she went along crying to herself—could it be possible

that her father had done this dreadful thing?

She had hoped to get, unseen, into the house, but poor Letty, as she came up the garden-path, was standing at the open door looking for her.

“Oh, my darling, how wet you are!” she cried, innocently, and she hurried forward to meet Dorcas with hands already stretched out to unfasten her dripping cloak; but the girl, with an involuntary spasm of anger, shrank back as she would have touched her.

“I can take it off; you will only get yourself wet too. I will change all my things; you need not come upstairs with me,” she said, quickly and imperatively; and without a word of kindness threw down her hat and mantle in the porch, and ran up to her own room.

She was hard, she knew, but yet it seem-

ed to her that she could not help being hard; had not her mother deceived and cheated her all her life? The sight of the gentle little woman had roused no tenderness in Dorcas's heart; instead of that it had only seemed to quicken her to a keener and fiercer sense of the wrong done to herself. She had no pity in these first hours—not one grain of pity—for the poor mother who had suffered so much more than *she* would ever do.

She changed her clothes, and then sat down to try to think; but she could not think yet, she could only feel, and writhe beneath her cruel sense of humiliation. How could her father have ever done this thing? She let her hot, young indignation burn at first against him too. If he had been what she had always thought him, how could he ever have married a common servant?—how could he so have degraded

himself, she thought. Intolerant, as most young creatures are—seeing but one path of right, as most young creatures do—she judged and condemned him in her blind anger and sorrow : not remembering how little of the story she really knew—how much, of which she was still ignorant, there might be yet untold upon the other side. She only thought hotly that a thing had been done that never should have been done, and so, in her untried virtue, she emptied the vials of her condemnation upon the doers of it. Upon her father, indeed, with tenderness blended with her anger, but upon her mother (in these first hours) *without* tenderness at all.

Poor Letty might well say that we are hard when we are young!—hard in our own righteousness—hard in our judgments of all who fall below our lofty, narrow standard of right and wrong. Dorcas had no pity for her mother as she

sat brooding over this thing that she had heard. When Letty came to the door a couple of hours after her daughter had returned to the house, and gently opened it and looked in, with her anxious, wondering face, it was not pity at all, but an unreasonable flame of anger that sprang up in the girl's heart.

"My dear, I thought you must be lying down. You have been such a long time here—and so quiet," Letty said.

And then Dorcas gave an annoyed and hasty answer to her.

"I have just been sitting down—resting. What is the use of looking after me? You need not fear that I have not taken off my wet things: there they all are," she said.

The clothes she had changed were still lying on the chair where she had flung them, and Letty, without speaking again

(only perhaps disturbed and wondering a little) came forward and began to lay them straight.

“Your poor frock is so draggled ; it will need to be washed,” she said. “Oh, dear, just look how wet it is! I can’t think why you came all through the rain, my dear? I made sure you would shelter somewhere.”

“I *did* shelter,” the girl said, shortly. “I went to Mrs. Cameron’s.”

“Mrs. Cameron’s?” Letty paused in her occupation for a moment, and—to Dorcas’s imagination, at least—an uneasy look passed over her face. “What—the old woman living near the little bridge? I didn’t think you knew her, Dorcas?”

“Oh, yes—I have often spoken to her.”

And then Letty made no answer, and in silence went on folding up the clothes.

“I stayed in her cottage till I was tired,” Dorcas said, after a minute. And then she added, hastily—“She told me to tell you that her daughter is here, and that she wants you to do something for her.”

“What—Martha?” Letty asked, quickly, and now the colour really rose to her cheek. “Did you see her?” she said, after a moment’s pause.

“No—she was out. But Mrs. Cameron told me to tell you that she was very poor.”

“Oh, I’ll see and do something for her.” Letty said this quickly too, and then gave a hasty, uneasy, half-imploring glance at the girl’s face. What did she know? What had been told to her? She folded up the remaining clothes in silence; with a poor, timid effort to win a touch of kindness from her daughter before she went away, she put her hand upon her shoulder.

“Are you not coming downstairs, Dor-

cas?" she said. "Don't sit up here so long alone. Your head is not aching, is it, my dear?"

"You know I never have headaches," Dorcas answered, testily, and made a movement almost as if she would shake off the caressing hand.

And then poor Letty went away, and the girl, as she closed the door, knew that she had been very hard and cruel, and yet she was too angry and bitter to repent.

Had not her mother done wrong? Would her father ever have married her, or thought of marrying her, if somehow the fault at first had not been hers?

She had begun painfully to link the few facts that had been given her together, and to make something like a connected story out of them. Her mother and Martha Cameron had been fellow-servants here together: was not that what Mrs. Cameron

had said? Mrs. Markham must have got her brought here (oh, that was what Mrs. Markham meant, Dorcas bitterly thought, when she said that Mr. Trelawney had been good to her mother *before* he fell in love with her!); she must have got her brought here, and then, somehow, they must have made him promise to marry her. Had Martha Cameron had anything to do with it, she wondered?—or was it Mrs. Markham who had managed it all? For it *must* have been managed somehow—it *must!* the girl passionately reiterated; left to himself, her father would never have lowered himself to do this thing.

Dorcas's cheek was burning as she sat thinking, and weaving her cruel story. Oh, how hard it was!—how hard for *her!* If only it could have been kept from everybody's knowledge!—if, after his marriage, he had gone to live in some new place!—

but to think that, of all the people she had lived amongst all her life, there was not one who did not know this thing that *she* had never known—that they must have talked it over a thousand times—that there was no one she ever spoke to who did not know what her mother had been ! Poor little proud Dorcas, who had held her head till now so high ! This trouble of hers was a very unsubstantial trouble, perhaps, yet, coming as it did, it seemed to her to be very hard to bear.

She heard her father's voice calling to her after a long time, and, with a miserable feeling almost of repulsion (for, alas, if her trouble itself was not very real, the emotions that it awoke in her were only too genuine—cruel promptings of the devil that lurks in every heart), she went down to the study. There was some passage in a book that Mr. Trelawney wanted her to find for

him, and she sat down and found it. But she had no pleasure in the service that she did for him. She stood by his table when she took back the volume to him, with the hand that was usually fond of straying to his neck hanging listlessly by her side.

“You have been away from me all this morning. Are you going to stay a little here now?” he asked her, after a few moments, smoothing her arm softly with his own hand; and she merely answered—“Yes, if you like,” half aloud, and, as quickly as she could, sat down at a distance from him.

It was Mrs. Markham against whom her ignorant, unjust indignation was beginning now to turn its fiercest blaze; but still, even if her father had been only weak, did not his weakness alone degrade him from his former high estate? She said to herself that it did, as she sat with the book upon

her knees that she did not read—thinking—thinking, till she was weary and sick.

For two or three days poor Dorcas bore the burden of this trouble of hers in silence, and, to tell the truth, during these days she was not an agreeable inmate of the house. She shut herself up with her vexed thoughts, and her thoughts made her very crabbed and fractious. She had had a stab, but she did not confess to anyone that she had had a stab, and so the wound festered, and went on paining her more and more, when a little frank talk, and a little tender sympathy, might have done much to heal it. But she held her peace, because she did not believe that it could be healed, and because she was too proud to reveal how her pride had been hurt, and too miserable to tell how her respect for her father had been lowered.

She suffered in silence for three days, and then, at the end of that time, the truth came out.

“Are you not well, Dorcas?” her father had said to her more than once; and Letty had watched her hour after hour—not innocently, and in the dark, as to the cause of the change in her, as Mr. Trelawney was, but with timid and increasing fear and pain—with fear that made her shy and constrained in the girl’s presence, and almost checked all expression of anxiety or tenderness.

For she almost guessed the truth, though she had not the courage to tell Dorcas that she guessed it: the thought that the girl had learnt the secret which she had tried so long to hide from her tortured her through these days with pangs of misery and remorse, by the side of which Dorcas’s sufferings were light.

“Dorcas, have you nothing to say to me?” she summoned up courage to ask her once, and piteously laid her hand on her daughter’s arm; but Dorcas would not answer her appeal. A hundred times already the girl had questioned with herself whether she should confront her mother with the knowledge she had gained, and claim her right to be told the rest that she did not know; but, should she do this at all, she had no intention of doing it amidst caresses and tears. So, when Letty spoke, with her lip quivering, and set that tender clasp upon her arm, she turned away unmoved, without a word.

“She is angry with me, and she will not tell me why she is angry,” poor Letty said, sadly, after this, to her husband. “I think she has heard something in the village, and that that is what has vexed her.”

“What should she hear in the village?”

he replied, quickly, not understanding her meaning for a moment; and then she told him how Dorcas had been at Mrs. Cameron's, and how she had been "strange" to her ever since.

Mr. Trelawney sat still without answering her for a little while after she had finished speaking. Was *his* first impulse, too, as his daughter's had been, to be angry with poor Letty?—to think that whatever burden there might still be to bear in this business would be most justly borne by *her* patient shoulders? Possibly his first feeling was one of irritation, but, if it was, he subdued it before he spoke.

"Mrs. Cameron is an old mischief-maker if she has been telling her anything," he said, after a little silence; "but if she has we had better find it out. I will speak to Dorcas. That is all we can do. Perhaps she was sure to hear the story sooner or

later. We cannot help it, Letty. You must not fret about it." And he drew her to his side, and took her hand. "It will make no real difference," he said, hopefully. "She loves us both too well to mind such a thing—except for the moment. She has too much good sense. Believe me, dear, she will not mind it."

He was kind to her, and tried to comfort her; but, nevertheless, in spite of his hopeful words, his own courage sank, and his heart felt rather faint when, a few hours after this, he called Dorcas to his side, and began the execution of his self-imposed task.

It was late in the evening—after sunset. He had finished his work for the day, and thrown himself back in his easy-chair, as if to rest; and it was then, in the dusk, that he called her to him.

She had been sitting in the window-seat,

reading, for a good while. She got up when he told her to come to him, and went to his side unsuspiciously. He merely meant to talk for a little, she supposed, before he lighted his lamp. But when she sat down near him he took her hand, and then the first grave words that he spoke startled her.

“Dorcas, you have let something come between us during these last days,” he said. “What is it? I want you to tell me. Perhaps your mother and I both guess what it may be, but we cannot be sure until you tell us that we have guessed right. I think you have heard something this week that has vexed you. Is this not so?”

Her hand almost unconsciously, as he began to speak, had made a spasmodic effort to escape from his, but he held it tight, and after a moment it lay passive again in his clasp. But when he asked his

question she hung her head, and made no answer to it, and he had to repeat it before, in a low voice, she said the one word—  
“Yes.”

“Where did you hear it? Was it in the village—at Mrs. Cameron’s?”

And then she said “Yes” again, almost below her breath, with her heart beating in great throbs.

There was a pause after this, but only for a moment or two; after that he said, very quietly—

“She told you something about your mother before her marriage? Was that it?”

“Yes,” Dorcas said for the third time; and then he felt her hand quiver, and heard her begin to sob.

No doubt it was hard for him too. Can it ever be anything but hard for a father to have to justify himself to his own children?

—to excuse and explain some act that he has done, and plead with them against their condemnation? Mr. Trelawney was a proud man, and the thing he had set himself to do was very bitter to him, so bitter that as he began to speak again the iron went into his soul. Perhaps in past years he had suffered at times pretty sharply on account of his marriage, but no doubt the keenest suffering he had ever known was what he endured now, as he sat here with his daughter by his side, knowing that the thing which had been told her had come like a sword between them, and shaken the faith and trust in him that she had had all through her life.

He suddenly put her hand away from him before he began to speak again. He put his own hand up to his forehead, and leant upon it, and spoke so, without looking at her.

“I know you were never told that your mother was a poor girl before I married her,” he began. “Perhaps it would have been better if you had known it—I think it would have been better; but we made a mistake, I suppose. I will tell you now how it happened. Your mother came first to this house when she was almost a child—when she was only fifteen; she had been left an orphan, and she was far from strong, and by my leave Mrs. Markham brought her here that she might have a home and be of what use in the house she could. Mrs. Markham was my housekeeper then. From the first—from my first acquaintance with her, I mean—your mother had tastes above her class. She was fond of reading, and after a time the idea was started that she should qualify herself to become a national school teacher, and for a year or so

—I forget for how long—she studied with a view to that. This was when she was about seventeen.”

Mr. Trelawney paused here for a few moments. The part of his story that had to come next was the part that was the hardest to tell.

“I never had a thought of marrying her, Dorcas!” he went on, after that silence, abruptly, and almost passionately. “How it came about was by no fault either of hers or mine. It all came out of that miserable village gossip. I had taken an interest in her, and they began to blame her for it,—and I could not let her suffer. That was the whole, Dorcas. I could only keep them from speaking ill of her by making her my wife. She was not to blame, nor was Mrs. Markham to blame. I acted against Mrs. Markham’s advice. No purer-minded or more innocent-hearted woman

than your mother ever lived. I have no right—I have no right even now (when it is a terrible thing to me to have to sit here and try to justify myself to you) to utter one regret for the step that I thought myself obliged to take. Poor as she was, and uneducated as she is, in all the years that we have lived together I have never had one moment's true cause to be ashamed of her. Nor have you, Dorcas—nor have you !” he added, almost fiercely ; and then suddenly closed his lips.

The silence lasted for a little while, and then it was broken suddenly by the girl's low voice.

“ Papa !” she said, beseechingly.

The little hand of its own accord had stolen again to his ; all at once, with a tremor and a sob, she laid her cheek down on his shoulder.

“ Papa, forgive me ! I will never mind it

any more," she began to say. "Oh, I might have known—I might have *known* you would never do anything but what was right! It was only that I could not see it—I could not understand it; that was all. Oh, you were good and right; you were my own father!—you could not have done anything else," she cried, and thrilled and sobbed in her sudden revulsion of feeling, and kissed his lips, his cheeks, his hands in a generous passion of remorse.

He drew her to him and returned her kisses, and blessed her. What would his life have been worth if this girl had turned her heart away from him?

"We have made it hard for you in some respects, my darling; I know that," he said, presently, to her. "You would have more friends if your mother's position had been different. There are some people who will always look down on you because you are

her daughter. That is a cruel thing for you to have to bear, but you must *try* to bear it—for your father's sake,—and you must forgive him for it.”

“Oh, my dear, I have nothing to forgive!” she cried.

“And you must love your mother, Dorcas. Love her, and be tender to her. Sometimes I think—” he spoke with a little hesitation, “sometimes I think that—we both of us forget her too much—that we are too much wrapped up in one another. My darling, let us help each other to be kinder to her. She ought not to feel that she is not one with us. God knows, *she* has loved us both. I have never deserved the affection she has given me. Remember—if you should ever be left alone with her after I am dead—remember that I told you that.”

But at this she interrupted him with a

cry. "Oh, no! Oh, no!" she said. She would not conceive of such a time, nor picture to herself a life in which her mother and she should be together, and her father gone.

They sat with one another for a long while, with that blessed sense of re-union between them, which, when it comes, is like balm to heal all mortal pain. How could she have been so unhappy only one little hour ago? she thought to herself, in the sweet repose of this regained content. The burden that had weighed her down seemed to have vanished—her trouble that had been so heavy to bear became light and thin as air. Ah, how wicked she had been in her ignorance! How disloyal she had been to pass judgment on him!—to say in her heart that he had degraded himself, when, instead of degrading himself, his act had been an act of noble self-sacrifice—a

royal act—that a thousand other men would not have done.

Had her mother ever understood and felt it, she said to herself, as *she* understood and felt it now? Perhaps, in her remorseful exaltation of her father—as she placed him back with plaudits on the throne from which, for a little while, she had cast him down—she paid her homage still at the expense of some little injustice to poor Letty, some grudging of the pity that she should have felt for her, some withdrawing of the acknowledgment which she should have made that she too had been without blame. But Dorcas did not perceive this as she sat with her father's hand in hers, feeling, as she caressed it, as though she were not worthy to caress it, because she had sinned against him.

And, meantime, while they were so happy with one another, Letty was sitting by her-

self, anxious and expectant ; but I am afraid for a good while they neither of them thought of that, and even when Mr. Trelawney remembered it at last, and told the girl to go to her mother, Dorcas lingered, and did not want to go.

“Need I say anything to mamma?” she asked, reluctantly. “Oh, surely I need not. I don’t know what to say.” And it was only when he pressed her that she obeyed him.

“It would not do to say nothing to her. She has been very unhappy about you,” he told her. And so then, at last—but still unwillingly—she went.

She found her mother sitting at her work. It had got dark, and Letty had lighted her candles. She looked up when Dorcas came into the room with eyes that their long waiting had made rather hopeless and weary, and only smiled a little faintly when the

girl came to her side and kissed her cheek.

“Mother, I have been very cross this week, and—I have been vexing you, I know,” Dorcas said, rather suddenly and quickly. “I have been very bad—but I want you to forgive me, please. I have been talking it all over with papa, and—and—he has made everything right,” she ended, shortly and hastily.

She bent down over the gentle face, and kissed it again; and—what could Letty say? Perhaps as she sat alone she had been trying to rehearse some words to speak to her daughter, but they died on her lips as Dorcas made her rapid little speech, and gave her swift caress. Between these two, you see, there had always been so little confidence, and they were shy of one another. Dorcas had made it all right with her father; that, it seemed, was all she

had to say to Letty, and the mother's timid heart shrank as the few cold words came.

"My dear, I thought that I should like to speak to you. I—I have been very unhappy," was all she was able to say.

"Yes, I know; but don't mind it now, mother," the girl said again, quickly. "I know it is all right, and I had no business to be troubled. I understand it all now—*quite*," she said, and took her mother's hand for a moment, and pressed it, and then turned away. As she went she felt that she ought to have said something more, and yet she did not know what she could have said. There was some inborn, invincible stubbornness in her; the very consciousness that she ought to have been tenderer kept her tenderness back.

She took up a book, and sat beside her mother reading it almost in silence for an hour, and then her father joined them, and

they talked for a little, and presently the clock struck eleven, and she went to bed. She was tired, and not quite satisfied with herself. She had been so happy for part of the evening, but the young face was rather sad now, and she sighed, she scarcely knew why, as she laid her head upon her pillow.

Sometimes, when she was half or quite asleep, it was still Letty's habit, as it had been when she was a little child, to come into Dorcas's room and look at her, and to-night she came before the girl's eyes were almost closed. She opened the door softly, and came to the bedside, and stood still for a moment or two, and then went down on her knees.

"My dear, I want another kiss from you," she said, with wistful tenderness. "Oh, Dorcas," she cried, suddenly, "one kind kiss, to help me to go to sleep!"

She put her arms about the girl, and bent down over her, and then—though she had asked for the kiss, she did not put her lips to Dorcas's, but all at once—

“Oh! my darling, can you not forgive me?” she began to cry out bitterly. “You wouldn't speak to me downstairs—but oh, speak to me now. Do you think I did so wrong? I was so young, Dorcas, and I didn't know—and he was all the world to me. Dorcas, I didn't know!” she repeated, piteously. “When I found out that I had done harm to him it almost broke my heart. Won't you believe me, my dear? Won't you believe me, and forgive me for what I did?”

“I do believe you, mamma,—of course I do believe,” Dorcas cried, in distress.

“It is such a long time ago, and I have suffered so. I would have died for him, you know, and instead of that I did harm

to him, and when it was once done I could never undo it. I used to wish that I could die, Dorcas : that would have been the only thing—but I couldn't die. And then you came, my dear—and, oh, Dorcas, from the time you were a little baby in my arms I have been thinking of this day, and of how they would tell you what I had been,—and you would be ashamed."

"Mother, I am not ashamed!" the girl cried, in great agitation.

She raised herself in bed, and put her arms about poor Letty's neck. It was not love for her that she felt like the love she had for her father, but a great wave of remorse and tenderness and pity had risen in her heart, and overwhelmed and conquered her.

"Mother, I have been very hard to you. Forgive me for it. I will never be ashamed of you—I will never be ashamed of you!"

she began to murmur, and kissed the poor weary face with many a kiss. "You have been the kindest mother to me—the kindest, gentlest mother," she said; and then her voice broke, and she began to sob.

The hour began in pain, but yet it was a blessed hour to Letty, as she sat, after a little while, by Dorcas's side, holding her hand in hers. They talked a little more; in the quiet and the darkness Letty found courage to say some things that had been for a long time in her heart. She told the girl, who had hitherto known or guessed so little, something of what her life had been—of its brief joy and its long sadness—of its hopes that had died in disappointment.

"I have nothing to complain of, my dear—nothing to complain of," she said, with quiet pathos. "Something too great was given to me—that was all; and, you see, I wasn't fit for it. It has all been a failure—

I have been so little use to either of you. But you've both been kind to me—you've both been kind and good, my dear," she said, and took the little hand and humbly kissed it.

More than once Dorcas drew down her mother's face to hers; she was touched unspeakably as she listened to her gentle, uncomplaining words. How little had she ever deserved this patient devotion! How little had she ever returned or cared for it! She said a few words, but there were stronger words in her heart than any that she spoke. "I have been a careless, cruel daughter. I will pray to God to forgive me, and to make me kinder," she thought. Before they parted, she asked Letty again to forgive her. "My dear mother!—my dear, kind mother!" she called her, as Letty kissed and blessed her.

So it turned out in the end that, instead

of evil, it was only good that came of this discovery which Dorcas had made, and that these two were drawn closer together by the thing that Letty had feared so long would separate them. Nay, were they not even all *three* drawn more together? Mr. Trelawney, too, had been touched with pity for Letty; the call that had been made upon his loyalty to her had roused something more than loyalty in his breast.

On this night, after she had been with Dorcas, he spoke a few strong grateful words to her.

“I often seem to be forgetful of you, Letty—I often seem to neglect you,” he said, “but, if you could see my heart, you would know that I do you justice. If you have ever thought that I regret our marriage you have been wholly wrong. I do not regret it; instead of that, I thank God

for it, for never did any man in this world have a kinder, or more devoted, or more unselfish wife."

And then he took her in his arms with a close and warm embrace,—and need I say that she was a happy woman? It seemed to her this night as if the burden of years had fallen away from her, and left her young again.

Nor did her joy pass wholly from her even as time went on. It is true that in her husband's manner towards her there came little visible change: a few more sentences spoken to her now and then, perhaps—some trifle of additional kindness shown her occasionally—these were the only signs he gave of any increased consideration for her; but when she had the remembrance of those words of his to live on, might she not well be content? she often asked her-

self. They seemed such sweet and blessed words to her—guerdon and reward enough for all her years of love and service.

And was not Dorcas kinder to her? The girl was touched by remorse, and by something gentler and tenderer than remorse. Was it not indeed true that she had been ashamed of her mother, and was she not wicked because she had been ashamed? She began to approach her with a new feeling—to think of her with something kinder and better than her former careless, half condescending regard. Some of the words Letty had spoken on that night when her poor loving heart had revealed itself for a little while to her daughter, haunted the girl's thoughts afterwards, and filled her with a keen and painful pity. How little had she ever thought of her! How little had she ever understood or cared to understand her!

Perhaps during the next year Dorcas became a little more grave and thoughtful and reserved than she had been before: she drew a little more within herself: she was not quite so happy as she had been: the innocent girlish eyes had been opened to something that they had not known before. She grew a little proud, a little shy; the old frank manner changed a good deal for a time. Had she not eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and found it bitter in her mouth? She shrank for a while from her old friends; she became suspicious, and thought that they looked down on her. She had to bear her little wound, and smart under it, before any wholesome healing came.

But, if she suffered for a time, she was too young and healthy to suffer long. The truth was *so*—as she had learnt it; yet all the same did not the sun still shine above

her head as it had done six months ago, and the breezes blow as softly on her? The young life stirred in her too joyously and strongly for any merely sentimental trouble to curb it long. The world, to her, had seemed her enemy for a little while, and she had been ready to ride full tilt against it, lance in hand; but now, if she did not quite throw her lance aside, at least she laid it in rest; she unbuckled her armour; she gradually began to cease to see imaginary foes.

She was a creature so much more made for happiness than for warfare that, gradually and inevitably, her nature in time righted itself again.

“Papa, I think people are never unkind or cruel long,” she said, one day, abruptly, to her father. “It seems to me as if bad feelings only come to one for a little while; but good feelings and happy feelings, *they*

come back as often as we drive them away—again and again.”

“Is that what your experience has been, my daughter?” he asked her, when she made this speech. He smiled a little; he put his hand tenderly on her hair. To him there was so little of the dross, the weakness, and the imperfection of earth about her,—so much of the brightness and the goodness and the purity of heaven,—that even to speak of wicked and cruel feelings as having part in her at all seemed to him almost like a jest.

## CHAPTER VII.

**T**IME passes so quickly when it passes monotonously: they woke one morning and found that Dorcas was nineteen. "Quite a great age," her father said to her, and she laughed, and answered, Yes, she should be growing old soon. She laughed, but, after a moment or two, she also gave a little sigh.

"I wish something would happen," possibly she thought in her heart. "We are very happy; it is all very nice here; everybody is very good and kind, but there is so much to see and know in the world, and I should like to go into it a little, and see other places, and other people."

She had begun, you see, like most young creatures, to want to try her wings. It is not in youth that we long for peace and rest, and find these things sweet enough to satisfy us.

Did she ever grow a little tired as she sat in her father's quiet study, reading the books that she loved, indeed, but not as he did? He had tried hard to make a student of her, and to a small extent he *had* made her a student : she could be content enough on winter evenings to listen to him for hours as he read his favourite authors to her, nor would she find the hours too long; but often, when the sun was shining, I am afraid it seemed to her that there were pleasanter things in the world than Greek and Latin, and she would grow a little weary as she turned her pages, and would spring up gladly enough at last to go and wander in the meadows, or in the woods. She was

full of life, and the young feet got tired of sitting still; she was full of energy and eagerness and longing.

“Shall we ever go somewhere together, father?” she would say to Mr. Trelawney sometimes. “Somewhere a long way off—to Rome or Venice? You would be so happy there. I know you would be happy. Let us pack our portmanteaus up when winter comes, and go to Rome.”

But he would only smile, and shake his head; or half promise, but never carry his promise out.

“Perhaps we may do it next year, Dorcas,” he would say. “Next year—next winter—or the winter after.”

It was so easy to make half-promises, and so easy to put off the fulfilment of them. They used to talk about their travels—there was nothing Dorcas loved to talk of better; but she found it hard to kindle the others

with her own enthusiasm. Mr. Trelawney had seen most of these places to which she wanted to go, and was contented with the recollection of them. I am afraid that at this period of his life his own fireside had greater charms for him than they had; his own fireside—the peace of his own house—the familiar quiet in which he had lived for so many years.

“Papa, you get so lazy,” Dorcas often said. “You are not old yet—you are only sixty-two; and there is mamma—mamma is not forty, and yet you both like to go on as if you were quite done with life. I think some morning I shall have to start for Italy all alone, and then, when you find I am gone, you will come running after me.”

But this threatened flight had not, at any rate, taken place up to the time when Dorcas became nineteen.

It had happened to her to have one lover before she reached that age ; but, to tell the truth, his wooing had not been a pleasant event in her remembrance. He was a young doctor, whom Mr. Gibson had taken as his partner—a most unexceptionable and amiable young man. Dorcas used to meet him at the Gibsons' house, and he fell in love with her there, and she—being only seventeen at that time—was very much embarrassed when he fell in love with her, and tried quite shamefacedly to keep the fact concealed from everyone.

The matter was a burden upon her mind and conscience for about the space of three months. During these months she was invited often by the Gibsons to their house, for they highly favoured the young man's suit, and these invitations Dorcas used to accept with hesitation and discomfort, too shy to tell her mother why she wanted to

refuse them, too shy to let the Gibsons perceive that she knew why they were given.

“Come over to tea, Dorcas, and Mr. Hardy will see you home; he will be delighted,” Mrs. Gibson would say to her often, and press the girl till, uncomfortable and embarrassed, she would consent and go; and then she would have to pass some three or four hours in Mr. Hardy’s company, and at the end of that time, in spite of the fact that Elizabeth was always in attendance to accompany her home, Mr. Hardy would never permit her to depart save under his escort, nor leave her until he had convoyed her to the garden-gate. In after-years she used to laugh at all she suffered during these days, and at the recollection of the shamefaced timidity which kept her from dismissing her unwelcome wooer; but at the time the matter weighed upon her

girlish mind, and disturbed her most genuinely and seriously.

What demure and formal conversations she and Mr. Hardy used to hold as he walked by her side along the muddy lanes ! He was rather a grave person, not very easy in his manner, full of goodness, and full also of sincere love, which made him too, as well as Dorcas, shy, and, I am afraid, added not a little to his awkwardness.

They used to talk a great deal of the weather, and of the rain and wind, and whether or not the winter was going to be a mild one, and how hard it was for the poor when the cold lasted long. He talked very sensibly, and Dorcas generally agreed with every word he said. There was, indeed, on almost all occasions the most delightful unanimity between them ; they were both of them too shy or too polite to

disagree upon any subject whatsoever ; their conversation arranged itself into a series of statements and assents. It was not Dorcas's habit to assent too much in talking with people generally ; she was not averse to an argument ; she liked at times to spice her discourse with a sprinkling of disagreement ; but all salt and pepper was eliminated from it utterly during these penitential walks with Mr. Hardy ; her talk at these times—the talk of both of them—was like an unflavoured dish. Yet still, tame and insipid as it was, those half-hours spent beside her continued to be not penitential, but Paradisiacal, in Mr. Hardy's love-blinded eyes.

He was a young man with fair prospects, and, as regards even present means, capable of supporting a wife.

“ He has a nice little income, independently of his profession, my dear,” Mrs. Gibson

one day told Dorcas; "nothing very great, you know, but not less than two or three hundred a year."

At which piece of information Dorcas said, "Oh, indeed!" and blushed, and felt ashamed because she blushed; and then the other went on talking.

"Yes; I was so glad when I heard it, for it is such a help to a young man to have something to fall back upon. And it makes him able to settle early—and that is a good thing, too. There is nothing to prevent Mr. Hardy from taking a wife to-morrow—nothing, except the lady's consent, of course, you know," said Mrs. Gibson, laughing. And then Dorcas tried to join in the laugh, but joined only in an awkward way, and attempted to say something, which was, however, I am afraid, very much without relevancy or point.

What did other girls do who had lovers

whom they did not want? Did they speak to anybody about them? Did they tell their mothers? Dorcas asked herself these questions again and again; but she had no former experience of her own to fall back upon; she had read very few novels; she had no intimate girl friends from whom she could seek advice; she asked her questions, but she could not get them answered. To tell her mother about Mr. Hardy, she soon said to herself, would be useless, for what could her mother do, who had never seen Mr. Hardy except now and then at church; who never went out of her own house; who would be almost more alarmed at hearing that Dorcas had a lover than Dorcas was at the knowledge of that fact herself?

Then—could she tell her father? “Oh, no, no, no!” she cried out in horror, feeling that to broach such a subject to Mr.

Trelawney would make her sink into the very earth with shame. If, indeed, she could say something to Mrs. Gibson? But then, how could she say something to Mrs. Gibson, when Mrs. Gibson never said anything to her?

All this disturbance in poor Dorcas's mind went on during the winter before that last visit that I have recorded of Mrs. Markham's. She had been seventeen at Christmas, and it was in the months between Christmas and Easter that Mr. Hardy pursued his wooing, and took so many of those muddy walks along the Shepton lanes that to him were so much more delightful than they ever were to Dorcas.

"I'm clearly of opinion that Hardy should speak to Mr. Trelawney before matters go any farther, my dear," Mr. Gibson said, at last, one evening to his wife. "He's been

seeing a good deal of Dorcas—and I don't know that Trelawney quite takes it in ; at any rate, I shouldn't like him to have it in his power to say that we have been making up a match for his daughter without telling him about it. I think I'll say a few words to Hardy—if it should only be to relieve my conscience."

"Well, I *suppose* it will be best," Mrs. Gibson assented, reluctantly ; "and yet, if Mr. Trelawney were to interfere—? He's such an odd, fastidious kind of man."

"So he is—but, perhaps, that only makes it the more desirable that Hardy should speak to him."

"He certainly would be most unreasonable if he made any objection to Mr. Hardy. Considering what Dorcas's mother was, it would be a wonderfully good marriage for her."

“I think so too ; but still, fathers are not so eager always to marry their only daughters.”

“But if her own happiness were concerned, my dear ?”

“Ah, but then—*is* her happiness concerned ?”

And then Mrs. Gibson made no answer. To tell the truth, though she dearly wanted Dorcas to become Mr. Hardy’s wife, she had felt some little qualms of doubt more than once as to whether the girl’s wishes in the matter quite marched with her own.

So she made no reply, and on the following day Mr. Gibson found his opportunity, and spoke to Mr. Hardy.

“I don’t know if you will excuse my interfering, Hardy,” he said to him, “but you have been a good deal with Miss

Trelawney of late, and if—as it seems to me—you're taking a fancy to her, I think—seeing you have only met her at my house, and not at her father's—that you ought, for everybody's sake, to go up frankly and say a word or two to Mr. Trelawney. That is, if you have made up your mind, you know.”

“Of course I have made up my mind—of course you can't doubt that,” Mr. Hardy replied to this speech, eagerly. “If you think I might call on Mr. Trelawney there is nothing I should like to do more. I am only afraid of precipitating things—of injuring my cause by speaking before I have received any more—perhaps I should say *any* encouragement; but if you think it would be best to see him at once——.”

“Well, I think it would. I don't want to get into hot water with my old friend,

you know," Mr. Gibson replied, laughing; and then the other said quickly that he would call that very day; and in fact, before the day was more than two or three hours older he had presented himself with a beating heart at Mr. Trelawney's gate.

Mr. Trelawney was at home, and he was ushered into the study—whence a few moments before, although he did not know it, Dorcas had precipitately retreated, at sight of his figure advancing up the garden-path (a sight that set *her* heart beating too, though her lover would hardly have been flattered had he guessed the nature of the feeling that had aroused that agitation in her).

Mr. Trelawney rose up, as he came in, with a slightly inquiring expression on his face. He knew Mr. Hardy too little to expect a visit from him without some

special reason. When he had shaken hands with him and invited him to a seat, he paused and waited for his visitor to speak.

"I ought to apologise to you for having taken the liberty of calling on you," the young man began, almost indistinct in his excessive nervousness.

"Not at all," said Mr. Trelawney, courteously.

"You are very good to say so. I am only afraid—by the time I have told you the object of my visit—I am afraid you may think differently. That is to say——"

And then the poor lover began to shift his hat from one hand to the other, and his words began to die away upon his lips.

"What on earth is the matter with the man? Has he come to borrow money?"

Mr. Trelawney thought to himself, impatiently. But he said nothing, and merely waited formally till the other had recovered his speech.

“The truth is, sir,” Mr. Hardy said, almost desperately, after a few moments’ silence, “I have come to speak to you—about your daughter.”

“About my daughter !”

Mr. Trelawney echoed the words at first in simple blank surprise. For a moment he merely felt astonished ; then suddenly it flashed across him that Mr. Hardy was a doctor. Had he come to bring him bad news?—had he come to tell him——

“Good God !” he cried, hurriedly, terrified by the man’s manner, “what is it?—you don’t think she is ill ?”

“Ill ? No, no ; oh, nothing of the sort ! God bless me, no !” cried Mr. Hardy. He

was almost as agitated as he had made Mr. Trelawney. "I beg your pardon for alarming you, with all my heart. No, no; what I want to say is something as far from that as is possible. I have come to ask you—it is a great thing to ask, I know, but I have come to beg your permission—to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"*You?*" said Mr. Trelawney, and fixed his eyes full on the other's face.

Naturally enough the gaze embarrassed Mr. Hardy; his colour, which had come and gone several times already since he entered the room, rose in a flood up to his forehead; he moved uneasily on his chair.

"I have met her at Mr. Gibson's," he began, after a few moments, to say, nervously. "I don't know how anyone could see her without becoming attached to

her—that is, without admiring her, I mean. Of course I understand that, being what she is, she might look higher. I think a king might be proud of loving her,” said the poor young man, passionately; “but, though I am not worthy of her, I love her with my whole heart, and if you will give your sanction—if you will at least let me try to win her affections—— I should have told you,” he said, breaking off abruptly, “that I have a fair income—six hundred a year, I may call it, with the prospect of a further increase; a portion of it comes from private means——”

He was going on with his statement eagerly, when Mr. Trelawney gravely, at this point, put up his hand and motioned him into silence, upon which the broken sentence came suddenly to an end, and the young man sat with his lips closed, waiting,

with the veins swollen on his forehead, for the other's reply.

It came after a moment or two's pause.

"Will you have the goodness to tell me," Mr. Trelawney began, in a strange, harsh voice—"will you have the goodness to tell me whether you have come upon this errand with my daughter's knowledge?"

"No, no, certainly not!" Mr. Hardy eagerly exclaimed.

"Does she know that you wish to marry her?"

"I—I can hardly say. She may have guessed. I think perhaps she *must* have guessed."

"You have taken care to make it evident to her, I suppose you mean?" Mr. Trelawney said, drily. "Well, sir, I have no power to keep you from falling in love with my daughter; but, for the rest, Dorcas is at

present seventeen, and I should be sorry at such an age to see her the wife of you or any man. I tell you so plainly. I will speak to her, however, about this business, and, according to what I hear from her, you shall have your answer."

And then he rose from his seat, and, setting his lips, would have bowed the poor young lover to the door; but what lover could have gone under such circumstances?

"Mr. Trelawney, I beg you to pardon me, but—but I think I would rather that you said nothing to her," he broke out in trepidation, his very blood curdling at the thought of committing his cause to such an advocate. "I am in no sort of hurry—I would wait any time you might think reasonable—I only want you to let me have my chance. For God's sake, sir, do not

take it away by prejudicing her against me !”

“ Do you think I am a tyrant, that, if my daughter wants to marry you, I will refuse to let her do it ?” Mr. Trelawney suddenly cried, with one flash of fire in his eyes ; then the next moment he had recovered himself, and, opening the door, he sternly bowed his guest from the room, and a minute afterwards the young man found himself walking back to the garden-gate, with only those last angry words that Mr. Trelawney had spoken to console him in his discomfiture.

He went his way, and Mr. Trelawney went back into his study with a face whose tragic expression, if the cause of it had been told, would almost have made any looker-on laugh. The thing that had happened to him was a thing that happens to most

fathers—a misfortune for which the world at large would not give him much sympathy; but he sat down in his chair, and felt as though, should Dorcas want to marry this man, it would end his life for him—it would break his heart.

He called her after perhaps half an hour had passed. She had not come back to her place in the study after Mr. Hardy was gone: she had been too conscious to come; she was sitting in her own room, overwhelmed with curiosity and with shyness, waiting and listening, when her father's call made her heart give a bound.

“Yes—I am coming,” she answered to his summons; and then she took the best grip she could of her courage, and ran downstairs, and tried to enter the study with her usual look; but she could not enter it with her [usual look, and, as Mr.

Trelawney's eyes fell on her face, he knew in a moment that he had nothing to tell her—that the object of Mr. Hardy's visit was a matter with which she was as well acquainted as he was himself.

He held out his hand to her to call her forward. "Dorcas, come to me," he said, in a solemn, almost a sepulchral, voice. And then, when she came, he looked at her with his tragic eyes till, colouring all over, her own eyes fell.

"Dorcas, is this true—that you want to leave me?" he said, mournfully and reproachfully.

"I, papa?" she answered. The drooping eyes sprang quickly up again, with a great stare of innocent surprise. "*I* want it! Oh, no!" she said.

"My dearest, do you not?" he cried. There was such a change in his voice that

it was as if a flash of sunshine had come suddenly into the room.

“Papa, I never thought of it—never—never!”

“But you know what that man wants?—you know what brought him here?”

“Y—yes, I suppose so.” And then Dorcas hung her head again, with her cheeks on fire.

“And you don’t want to marry him? You don’t want to have anything to say to him?”

“Papa, I wouldn’t marry him for anything.”

“My darling!”

“I have been so dreadfully worried about it—oh, I did so want somebody to know—for I couldn’t tell how to stop it.”

“What—to stop him from making love to you?”

“N—o, he did not exactly make love. At least, I think not.”

“Well, what did he do?”

“Oh, he was always talking to me, and coming where I was, and—and looking at me.” All this with her eyes still cast down to the ground.

“And you did not on your side look much at him?”

“Papa!”—indignantly—“do you think I did?”

“If you had liked him it would have been natural, you know.”

“But I *didn't* like him,”—in an aggrieved tone.

“Poor young man!” (The words were words of sympathy, but Mr. Trelawney uttered them as if they had been a cry of jubilation.)

“He seemed to think that he was a very fit match for you, Dorcas.”

“ Oh, please, papa, don’t speak about it any more !”

“ But, my dear, we *must* speak about it a little more, for either you or I must give him his answer, you know.”

“ I thought you had done that ?”— shyly.

“ What, you thought I had sent him about his business at once, did you ? Well, no, I could not treat him quite so cavalierly. I had to tell him he should hear from me.”

“ Then you will write to him, please, and just say—say— Oh, you know how to do it.”

“ Not I, Dorcas ! I never had to do such a thing in my life.”

“ But that is no matter. You know all the same.”

“ I think *you* will have to do it.”

“ Oh, no, papa ! He has never said anything to me. I couldn't.”

“ But if *I* merely give him his answer he may think I am coercing you. You will have to write to him or else to see him, I suspect.”

“ Oh, please, no.”

“ I will tell you what we could do,”—after a moment or two. “ I might write to him, and tell him that if he is not satisfied with my answer he may ask for one from yourself.”

“ Yes, but, if you do that, tell him that he *need* not ask for one from me, because you know quite well what it would be. And, papa, do this too : let me see your letter, and then tell him that I have seen it.”

He laughed, and took the hand that had curled itself about his neck, and kissed it. Had he been so unhappy half an hour ago,

and now was he almost making a jest of the thing that had been so terrible to him ? “ What should I have done if my little girl had wanted to go away from me ? ” he suddenly said, and clasped her closely to him. The fear was past, the great danger was escaped from : did he forget too easily that another day might come when the sword might descend upon him, and *not* pass by ?

He wrote his letter ; but Dorcas had to write hers too. The poor young lover addressed an impassioned appeal to her, and she had to answer it, and she was very miserable when she had to answer it, and cried, and did not know how to be kind, and yet to crush all hope at the same time. She gave her letter to her mother at last when she had written it, and Letty read it, and Mr. Trelawney read it ; and then it was

sent to its destination; and with that this first little love episode of Dorcas's life came to an end.

Mr. Hardy had meant to settle in Shepton, but after Dorcas refused to marry him he did not settle there. He went away suddenly from the place, meaning, indeed, only to be absent for a few weeks, till he should in some degree have reconciled himself to his disappointment; but soon after his departure some family changes occurred unexpectedly, and gave him an excuse, or a reason, for throwing up his partnership, and making his home elsewhere. So he came no more to Shepton, and Dorcas was spared the pain of meeting him again.

It had all happened two years ago, and since that time the girl had had no other lover. "I don't suppose I shall ever marry," she often said to herself, thinking—perhaps

with a little regret—of how few heroes there were in Shepton. For of course it seemed to her that she could never want to marry anybody unless he were better and nobler than other people; and what chance had she of coming across anybody of that heroic type here?

“I wish that something would happen sometimes,” she said to herself on this nineteenth birthday. “We are all very happy, I know, and I suppose I ought to be content; but, oh! when one thinks what a big, big world it is, and what lovely things and places there are in it, and that we never see them, never go near them, never have anything new to think of from year’s end to year’s end!”

She stood at her window in the bright winter’s morning, looking out at the blue sky, at the leafless trees, and thinking this.

She was just a little dull—a little tired of her quiet life. The years would go on so fast, she thought, and she should grow old, and know nothing beyond this little spot of earth—nothing of all the far-off things about which other people knew.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.









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